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In-between zones: the impact of  
class and ethnicity on engagement  
with the Birmingham Repertory  
Theatre's youth theatre  
(The Young REP)

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By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts Education

University of Warwick, Institute of Education

August 2013

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## **Acknowledgments**

I am very thankful for the support of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, without which this thesis would not have been possible. All of the staff of the Learning and Participation Department have been very generous with their time. In particular I would like to thank Catherine Rollins for her logistical assistance, Rhys McClelland and Hannah Phillips for being so collaborative in the research process and Dr Steve Ball for his on-going support and advice.

I would like to thank Small Heath School and Shenley Academy for supporting the research, in particular Stephen Lane and Samantha Hughes. I am also immensely grateful to all of the members of the Young REP who agreed to participate in the research and did so with enthusiasm and candour.

My supervisor Professor Joe Winston has been invaluable in this process and I am very thankful for his support and belief in me.

Thank you to my fellow PhD students Juliet Raynsford, Dr Brian Lighthill, Dr Clive Holmwood and Dr Rachel King for being invaluable company on the journey.

On a personal note, thank you to my friends, particularly Joanne Souter, for being there for me unconditionally. Thank you to Sarah Ashworth and Newman Leung who listen so well and advise so proficiently. Thank you to my family – Marjory and Keith Hart and Karen Hamshaw-Hart for all of their support and love throughout this process. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Andrew Kerr who has been there for the good times and the bad and never stopped believing in me. Lastly, thank you to Pedro; he may only be a small dog, but his unfaltering presence and need for twice daily walks made the writing process a pleasure.

## **Declaration by candidate**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## **Related publications and conference papers**

### **Conferences and Seminars**

*Youth Theatre and Multiculturalism: an emergent case study in collaboration with  
Birmingham Repertory Theatre*

Presented at National Drama International Conference 2011, Drama- same difference;  
diversity and mutuality of process and practice, Swansea University, 11th - 14th April 2011

*Emerging thoughts: early case study research in collaboration with Warwick Arts Centre  
and Birmingham Repertory theatre on theatre and multiculturalism (with Rachel King)*

Presented at Researching Applied Drama, Theatre and Performance Conference -  
Performance, Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Co-existence, International conference at the  
University of Exeter, April 2-5 2008

*Emerging thoughts: early case study research in collaboration with Birmingham Repertory  
Theatre on theatre and multiculturalism (an interactive workshop)*

Delivered at Cambridge University FERSA (Faculty of Education Research Student  
Association) Postgraduate Student Research Seminar November 11th 2008

### **Published Work**

*Youth Theatre and Multiculturalism* Drama (National Drama's magazine) Spring 2012  
Volume 18.1 p12-16

## Abstract

The aim of this collaborative doctoral research project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is to explore the interrelationships of internationalism and multiculturalism and how they impact upon the aesthetic and ethical practices of the youth theatre groups (The Young REP) fostered by The Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Examining spatial dynamics, this research explores the hypothesis that there are 'in-between zones' generated by internationalism and multiculturalism which may provide ethical as well as aesthetic space for promoting community based theatre projects with young people of varied ethnicities.

I focus on three of nine youth theatre groups organised by the theatre and explore their relationship with the theatre and each other. The groups had differing access to the theatre building - occasional audience members (case study one), occasional performers (case study two), and regularly rehearsing/performing at the theatre (case study three). The study discovered that the more insider access a young person has to a theatre the deeper the levels of meaning they ascribe to it.

Case study one is based in a community with a majority Muslim Pakistani population. Highlighting the specific realities of being young and Muslim in 2011, the research explores the role that ethnicity has on engagement with the theatre and the youth theatre.

Case study two is based in a working class community. Interrogating the young people's own assessment of their area as 'chavvy', the research highlights the impact of class on accessing The REP and its youth theatre.

The final study explores the relationship to the theatre of a youth theatre group which rehearsed inside the building and the consequences of the theatre closing for refurbishment for two years. It also examines why this centrally based youth theatre group was unrepresentative of city demographics. I conclude by reflecting on the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the theatre.

This study should be relevant to other theatres, youth theatres and organisations seeking to increase their accessibility and cultural representation.

## Prologue

*“People who were abroad over the last 10 days will return to a different country from the one they left. England has been changed, perhaps permanently, by what has happened” (The Observer, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2011)<sup>1</sup>.*

*“For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring” (Romeo and Juliet, William Shakespeare, Benvolio, Act 3 Sc. 1 line 4)*

In August 2011 I was approaching the final stages of my field work with Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Since September 2010 I had been working with the Young REP (the Birmingham REP’s youth theatre) exploring the relationship that the youth theatre members had to their communities, the city and to the other Young REP groups. Crucially I was also investigating how the young people related to the theatre itself - a dynamic that was further complicated by the fact that The REP building went dark for 2 years in January 2011 for refurbishment. Using the lens of multiculturalism I had been considering the roles of ethnicity and class in how young people identified with the theatre and how The REP engages with young people who may not traditionally attend a youth theatre or be an audience member of the Birmingham REP.

During the summer holidays The REP were facilitating drama workshops in community settings by collaborating with *Positive Futures*, a Home Office funded initiative, which “[...]helps young people from deprived communities steer clear of crime, drug and alcohol misuse and move forward in their lives”. The purpose of the workshops was to introduce

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<sup>1</sup> Will Hutton

young people in these communities to the Young REP with the hope that some of them would then choose to attend one of the groups based in the center of Birmingham. This was part of an on-going and multi-dimensional strategy to further widen the diversity of the Young REP and engage with young people across the region.

During the week that these workshops took place a series of events unfolded which both shook the nation and resonated profoundly with the research that we had been undertaking at the Birmingham REP.

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 2011 at 18.15 Mark Duggan was shot dead by police. On 6<sup>th</sup> August 2011 a peaceful protest in Tottenham, demanding justice for Duggan's family, turned violent, possibly after police had had a confrontation with a 16 year old woman. The riots that ensued spread over the following nights, first to other areas of London, and then across the country. The media reported the violence in vivid detail with a plethora of images and metaphors. Everyone from Politicians to Police Officers, columnists to those questioned on the streets had their own opinion as to what was happening and why.

The violence disrupted the holiday period of the cabinet, forcing the prime minister home from his holiday as London "[...] witnessed devastating scenes of violence stretching the emergency services beyond limit on a third night of rioting in the capital...." (Guardian 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011)<sup>2</sup>. David Cameron described it as "Criminality pure and simple"<sup>3</sup>.

As the trouble spread across the country on the 8<sup>th</sup> August violence erupted in Birmingham's Handsworth area. This area is no stranger to disturbances and it evoked recollections of past riots: "It brings back memories of 1985. It's tragic, such bad memories" (BBC News, 9 August 2011)<sup>4</sup>. Central Birmingham was also the scene of riots.

This city was the site of my research and I had been questioning the young participants

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<sup>2</sup> Vikram Dodd and Caroline Davies

<sup>3</sup> David Cameron's Full statement on the UK riots, Guardian 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011

<sup>4</sup> Reverend Bryan Scott

about how they connected to this urban landscape; now groups of young people were viscerally demonstrating their relationship to this conurbation as “[...] a mob of up to 300 youths gathered, dispersed and regrouped, attacking shops. Chased by police, groups tried to get into the Mailbox shopping and office center near the city's rejuvenated canal basin, and the Palisades shopping complex above New Street station before staff brought shutters down.” (Guardian, 10th August 2011). Shops closed early on the 9th August for fear of further trouble and police later confirmed pockets of disorder. Then, in the early hours of the 10<sup>th</sup> August, three young Asian men were killed in the Winson Green area of Birmingham while protecting their community from rioters. The driver of the car that hit them was rumored to be a black male and there was palpable fear that the incident would lead to race riots akin to those in 2005 in the Lozells area of Birmingham. However, one of the most memorable speeches from this time (and there were many speeches) came not from a politician but from Tariq Jahan, the father of one of the murdered men, who called for calm. It seems his words were heeded: "I lost my son. Blacks, Asians, whites – we all live in the same community. Why do we have to kill one another? Why are we doing this? Step forward if you want to lose your sons. Otherwise, calm down and go home – please."(Guardian 11 August 2011)<sup>5</sup>

By the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> August West Midlands Police had made more than 300 arrests and almost tripled the number of police officers on duty. Calm was restored to the city's streets. In Winson Green a candle lit vigil for the three men who had been fatally hurt went ahead peacefully. Elsewhere in the country and in London the trouble died down and Police concentrated on arresting those involved.

Reports of incidents that had occurred during the riots were numerous. Descriptions of the scenes in London and other areas of the country were akin to those of war zones: “The

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Wintour, Martin Wainwright, Riazat Butt, Sandra Laville and Caroline Davies



smell of smoke, and angry young men moving with makeshift weapons. There are cars and buildings ablaze and the threat of violence.” (Guardian 13<sup>th</sup> August 2011)<sup>6</sup>. The Daily Mail reported on parents unable to visit their dying child because of the riots, a YouTube video was watched by millions of a youth being mugged by ‘his own’ as they pretended to help him recover from a previous attack. People talked of young people stealing bottled water alongside iPhones, trainers and designer goods. There were jokes that the book store Waterstones remained intact.

As courts sat through the nights hearing cases the lists of convictions were printed in the newspapers for all to marvel at, the youngest offenders being just ten years old. The courts were told to be tough on the offenders, and tough they were: a 23 year old man was jailed for 6 months for stealing a bottle of water from Lidl, a 24 year old mother in Manchester was sentenced to 5 months for receiving a pair of stolen shorts from her lodger (but was later released on appeal after general outcry at the harshness of the sentence). One of the most high profile convictions was of two men in their 20’s being given four year custodial sentences for inciting trouble on Facebook. Throughout the troubles there were calls for Facebook, Twitter and Blackberry Messenger to be shut down as some blamed them for allowing young people to ‘organize’ and encourage trouble. Others offered caution about such ideas, "Citizens also have the right to secure communications. Business, politics and free speech relies on security and privacy. David Cameron must be careful not to attack these fundamental needs because of concerns about the actions of a small minority."([guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Thursday 11 August 2011 13.01 BST)<sup>7</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup> August I accompanied The REP’s Youth Theatre Director to Handsworth to work with one of the *Positive Futures* groups. The atmosphere in the area was tense and eerily quiet. It was less than 36 hours since the three men had been mown down and killed in

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Beaumont

<sup>7</sup> Jim Killock, the executive director of online advocacy organisation Open Rights Group

Winson Green. Handsworth had been the scene of rioting earlier in the week, and although things were much calmer nobody knew if trouble would flare up at any moment. Until the day before the workshop, we were still unsure if it would be safe for it to go ahead, yet it felt like the most urgent time for work like this to be taking place.

It was not long before the hypotheses as to why it happened and how it should be handled came in abundance. Were these a 'feral underclass', as claimed by Justice Secretary Ken Clarke? Were policing tactics insufficient? Had Britain lost its moral compass: from bankers, to politicians to youth on the street? Was it best to be tough or compassionate? Was it the fault of too much liberal politics or too harsh conservative cuts? Should council tenants be evicted if they were found guilty of criminal activity associated with the riots, or would this increase the chances of further criminal behavior?

Whatever the causes of the riots they shook the nation, and the shocks were felt across the world as those in other countries looked on in disbelief. Most were quick to see it as the result of unresolved underlying issues firmly linked to community divisions. The Polish leading newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* blamed the "[...] failure of multicultural society"<sup>8</sup>, and Italy's *Corriere della Sera* described a "[...] night of urban guerilla war" in a city "struggling to deal with youth gangs and incapable of resolving its latent conflicts". Sydney's tabloid the Daily Telegraph claimed that it showed "[...] not every major city enjoys our cohesive qualities." It was a stark contrast to the images that a few months earlier had been beamed around the world of the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, as *Corriere della Sero* noted "London is not just the fairy tale of Kate and Pippa. There's also Tottenham."<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8688715/London-riots-world-reacts-to-citys-hungry-mutiny.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8688715/London-riots-world-reacts-to-citys-hungry-mutiny.html>

This troubled week in August marked the end of my role as a participant observer of The REP's work with young people, a role which I had begun 11 months earlier, and the flash of events that unfolded struck a chord with me. Questions around class, race, community, multiculturalism, government policies, cuts to the arts and public sector, engaging young people, the role of digital media - all of which had permeated my research for the last year - were now in the headlines and being debated hotly in editorials, the House of Commons and around the water cooler.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This thesis will explore the relationship that a major regional producing theatre, The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP), has with its youth theatre (The Young REP). The objectives embedded in the ethos of the repertory theatre movement include the aim that the theatre engages with its local community (Jackson, 2010, p20). The REP is based in the centre of Birmingham, which is an exceptionally diverse city with a strong chance of becoming Britain's first city with no single majority ethnicity (Cochrane, 2010, p128). Community is a complicated word to unpack and the plethora of potential communities within the theatre's local area offers external and internal diversity. In addition to identifying the communities that the theatre wishes to engage with, there is also the complication that not everyone sees the theatre as a welcoming building and barriers to accessing it are hybrid and multiple.

### **Research Focus**

In order to explore some of the potential barriers (and solutions) to accessing the theatre, this research will examine three of The REP's youth theatre groups. Two of the groups are based in specific geographic communities, targeted by the theatre to try to circumvent the identified barriers to theatre participation of ethnicity and class. The third is a group which was based in the theatre building until the theatre closed for two and a half years for refurbishment.

## **Key theoretical considerations**

This research will consider the value of the arts and specifically theatre and youth theatre. In considering the value it will therefore explore where there are barriers to accessing these forms and the ways these obstacles may be avoided. In order to thoroughly consider these areas it will be necessary to explore some key theoretical issues. A consideration of diversity naturally leads to the unpacking of the significant terms ethnicity, race and identity. These concepts require contextualisation within multiculturalism, internationalism, globalisation and cosmopolitanism. I will also analyse the term community, considering when it is impactful on the relationship that young people have with the theatre. Class is an emergent theme which grew out of the field work. I will explore why in the last 30 years class rhetoric has become less prominent in academic and political debate and crucially why, despite this, it is still a relevant area of exploration (Cannadine, 1998, p2 and p12; Jones, 2013, p9). All of these themes are entwined by the concepts of space and place and the consideration of these will be embedded in my research analysis. The scope of this examination has had to be limited due to the volume of data and the breadth of theory that this research has covered. Any one of the three case study groups that I focused on was complex enough to warrant the attention of an entire doctoral thesis. Therefore the literature to which I have referred is not exhaustive, but was carefully selected to be the most relevant to the cases being studied.

## **Collaborative Doctoral Award**

As an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) this research was framed within an existing research question before I embarked upon it. The research sought to explore pertinent issues for the theatre in order to inform the future aesthetic and ethical decisions they made for their youth theatre. Therefore, as well as being a theoretically rigorous piece of research it has also been a practical and

impactful study. I communicated my thoughts on the emergent data throughout the field work with The REP's Youth Theatre Director Rhys McClelland, (now former) Director of Young People's Theatre Hannah Phillips and Associate Director Steve Ball. I also provided them with a report, in the form of an article written for National Drama's magazine, *Drama*. In 2013, Reflecting on the article 18 months later, the Director of Participation (replacing the role of Director of Young People's Theatre), Jessica Farmer confirmed that it had impacted greatly upon the aesthetic and ethical decisions that they had subsequently made.

## **Structure of the thesis**

This thesis will begin by providing the context in which the research took place and will then explore the theoretical terms listed above in the form of a literature review. I will then outline my methodological framework and chosen methods citing the reasons behind these key decisions. This will be followed by a thorough analysis of the three case studies. Finally, I will present a conclusion reflecting on the changes within the Young REP since the research commenced, offering recommendations for The REP and any other organisations that seeks to widen participation.

## Chapter Two: Setting the scene

### My history with the Birmingham Rep

Positioned in the centre of England, Birmingham grew up out of the Industrial revolution.

It is an expansive, diverse and youthful city. By 2010 the population was around 1,000,000, 1/3 of this population classified as BAME and 22% of the population aged between 0 and 15 (which contrasts the national picture where pensioners outnumber children), making it the 'youngest' city in Europe. Situated on Broad Street in the center of Birmingham is the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP) which is the city's only major producing theatre.

Born and raised in Birmingham, my first experience of The REP was in 1993 when I was 13 years old and on a school trip to see their production of *Romeo and Juliet*. I was not a regular theatre attender - prior to this I only recall a school excursion aged 6 to the Midland Arts Centre (MAC) to see a puppet show of *Hiawatha*. I thoroughly enjoyed the production whereas my mother, attending as a parent helper, fell asleep to the amusement of my classmates. Her defence was that it was warm and dark.

Seven years later, on the occasion of visiting The REP, my mother had informed me that as I was going to the theatre I should 'dress up', and so I carefully selected a long black velvet skirt and applied some red lipstick for the occasion. As I gathered in the foyer of The REP with my class mates I can remember the excitement of doing something special and the feeling of being rather grown up.

I found the production itself a little slow and a bit perplexing. I was confused that Josette Bushell-Mungo was cast as Juliet, not because she was a black actress but because the rest of her family was white, and that Romeo (a young Damien Lewis) was white and his mother

black. I was happy to see a story about Romeo and Juliet that incorporated an element of race, but what confused me was that ethnicity was not a component of the production. I remember my English teacher explaining to me afterwards that The REP had a colour-blind attitude to casting. I immediately felt embarrassed that I had found an issue with the selection and deemed that The REP was right to have this approach to integrated casting. What I was unable to reflect on as a thirteen year old was that the overwhelming majority of my experience of drama up until this time was through television. Television casting is nearly always done naturalistically - thus, a black character would have black parents and a white character would have white parents, unless otherwise necessitated by the plot. This was the aesthetic I was accustomed to.

A few years passed after my first experience of The REP, and I continued to attend the theatre as an audience member moderately regularly. Then, upon the completion of my Master's degree, I worked freelance and was employed by The REP as a freelance drama facilitator. I felt a tremendous sense of pride at being employed by such a well-known institution; however, as a freelancer I was always aware of not having as intimate and relaxed a relationship to the theatre building as those who worked there as full time members of staff.

Then the opportunity emerged in 2007 to undertake doctoral research collaboratively with The REP and Warwick University; now I was in the position of researcher. My own experiences with The REP opened up pertinent questions around people's relationship to the theatre as a space and a medium.

In order to situate these questions I will now put the research into context by briefly outlining: the (recent) history of diversity in the arts in England; the history of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre; summarising the relationship between The REP and



diversity; giving an abridged version of the history of outreach and youth theatre at The REP; sketching the national and local picture of youth theatre at the time of the research.

## **The history of diversity in the Arts in England**

It is apposite here to provide a brief contextualisation of diversity in the arts in England in which to situate The REP at the time of this research. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a thorough examination of this history and I will discuss diversity in greater detail, along with multiculturalism, in my literature review. Therefore at this point I will simply summarise some of the key moments and movements.

### **The Arts Britain Ignores**

In 1976 Naseem Khan wrote a seminal report entitled '*The Arts Britain Ignores*' for the Commission for Racial Equality, in which she championed that Black and Minority Ethnic BAME arts should be regarded as *part* of British theatre rather than as a colourful superfluity, and thus should be funded and respected as such (Hingorani, 2006, p175). The following year the first British Asian theatre company, Tara Arts (founded by Sunil Saggar, Praveen Bahl, Vijay Shaunak and Jatinder Verma) performed their debut piece, *Sacrifice* - an adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's anti-war play (Hingorani, 2006, p176). The company was established in the wake of the murder of 17 year old Asian youth, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, by racist thugs. Verma recalls this incident as being the zenith of anti-Asian bigotry and the spark that spurred them to found Tara Arts. Conscious of being scarcely seen or heard in public spaces, the founders sought out dialogue, and theatre seemed the natural arena for this interchange. Still going strong today, dialogue has been an integral part of their work ever since (Verma, 2007; Verma, 2008).

### **The Macpherson report**

Sixteen years later and another racist murder, this time of black teenager Stephen Lawrence by white youths, had a profound national impact. The subsequent inquiry into

the police handling of the case and the release of the resulting Macpherson report in 1999 sent shock waves across Britain. In 2000 the Runnymede Trust released *The Report of the Commission on the future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, with the aim to examine the condition of Britain in regards to community relations and offer a means to foster racial justice in Britain. Initial reaction in the press centered round the suggestion that Britain was inherently racist and the report was reproached for trying to knock Britain off balance. Revisiting the paper in 2004 the author Bikhu Parekh stated that despite much resistance “Many of its recommendations have now been implemented, and the large issues relating to British identity, pluralism, cohesion and reconsideration of the traditional narrative of the country’s history are now being debated in public”(2004, p1). The fact that by the end of 2003 two thirds of the recommendations in the report had been instigated demonstrates how influential it was in shaping thinking on race equality at that time(Parekh, 2004, p2).

The report had highlighted the concern that the Arts sector did not recognise that institutional racism discussed in the Macpherson Report was an issue for their organisations. In response to this assertion the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published a race impact assessment, various government funded initiatives placed race equality and promotion in their core missions and initiatives were set up by various museums and libraries (Parekh, 2004, p6).

Significantly, The Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) placed a legal obligation on all public bodies to make race equality central to their work, and therefore a conference entitled *Eclipse* was held in June 2001 by Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and hosted by Nottingham Playhouse to look at combating racism in theatre (Hybrid, February 2008, p1). The conference aims were:

- To put issues relating to discrimination and positive action on the agenda of the boards of theatre companies
- To identify strategies and actions that could address these issues
- To raise awareness and understanding of relevant issues amongst participants in order that they can be shared in the wider theatre industry (Arts Council, 2002)

In 2003 as a result of the conference and the report, Eclipse Theatre Company was founded in order to redress the absence of black theatre in the regional mid-sized touring network, with the mission to raise the profile of “Black British theatre and practitioners and to broaden the diversity of work on offer for new and existing audiences in Regional Theatre, forming partnerships with regional theatres that share its values”<sup>10</sup>.

### **Arts Council Policy**

Since the 1970's the Arts Council has implemented a variety of strategies to increase equality in the arts such as allocating funds, setting targets, suggesting solutions to barriers and creating positive action initiatives. However not everyone has been wholly in favour of these measures and there has been scrutiny of these policies focused around the value of positive action, the fear that exercises become merely 'tick box' and the perception that these policies actually devalue the work of artists from diverse backgrounds (Arts Council, 2011). Although focused on the Visual Arts sector, reports which disputed the efficacy of existing cultural diversity schemes include *Take Away the Label* produced by Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre (2005) and Richard Hylton's *The Nature of the Beast* (2007) (Hybrid, February 2008, p1).

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/browse-regularly-funded-organisations/npo/eclipse-theatre-company-ltd/>

*Take away the label* was a 2005 report commissioned by AXIS as part of the Creative Renewal partnership funded by the EQUAL programme (a European Social Fund initiative which operated from 2002 – 2007 to tackle discrimination and inequalities in the labour market). It articulated that many artists from BAME backgrounds felt categorised by their skin colour and were concerned that they were engaged with on the basis of this rather than their artistic merit. They conceived that this was then detrimental because the schemes are then of limited use to the artists, can cause resentment from white artists who feel disadvantaged by positive action, and that the [sometimes] promotion of second rate work propagates the fiction that BAME artists are inferior. (MORRIS *et al.*, 2005). The report concluded that “Many of the artists we spoke to felt that current diversity policies are no longer an accurate reflection of the needs of artists, and that these policies could even be harming artists’ careers.” (MORRIS *et al.*, 2005).

In a similar vein, in 2010 a Third Text report was commissioned by the Arts Council England and compiled and edited by Richard Appignanesi, investigating official arts and cultural policy over the last thirty years. It is a complex and controversial report and so I will discuss it in more detail in my literature review, but here it is important to note that the report is heavily critical of the term cultural diversity and the policies it has generated. The report sees cultural diversity policies as a way to marginalise non-white artists, to appease greater social demands and quell the social resistance of non-white residents. It holds the policies responsible for cultural fragmentation (or apartheid as it is called several times), the ghettoising of non-white artists, and sees that the policies are driven from a fear of perceived British culture being changed by immigration. Rasheed Araeen, one of the report’s contributors, was critical of Naseem Khan’s seminal 1976 report both at the time and retrospectively. The ‘Black Art’ group which he was a part of boycotted the one-day conference by the Gulbenkian Foundation (which initiated the report) as they regarded this as a trick to diffuse and displace escalating radical demands through the lure of cultural

funding (Araeen in Appignanesi, 2010, p48). The Third Text report critiques the fact that non-white artists are compartmentalised rather than considered part of the arts establishment, and blames a deliberate exclusion from historical accounts as being fundamental to this. Although centred on Visual Arts the report has been fundamental in influencing the new direction in Arts Council diversity policy, from legal, moral, ethical and business cases to the fact that diversity and equality, “[...]are crucial to the arts by sustaining, refreshing, replenishing and releasing the true potential of England’s artistic talent regardless of people’s background” (Panayiotu in Appignanesi, 2010, p2).

Therefore, grounded in the above report, In 2010 Arts Council England launched their *Creative Case* for Diversity. The *Creative Case* is founded on the belief that diversity, in all connotations, is a fundamental component of artistic practice and that inclusivity results in a more vital arts sector (ArtsCouncil, 2011, p7 and p15). By shifting the focus from a problematising approach to diversity into a context where it is part of the fabric of discussions and decisions they ultimately are aiming for an arts community that “[...] sees diversity and equality as wholly integrated into its everyday thought and practice.” (ArtsCouncil, 2011, p8, p16 and p18).

## **The history of the Birmingham Rep**

For the purpose of context it is necessary to provide a history of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre itself. However as Claire Cochrane has written an excellent book exploring the history of The REP in detail it is neither necessary nor prudent to re-tread her thorough archival work. Therefore in this historic contextualisation I will draw on her work and concentrate on The REP after the Broad Street building opened on 1971, focusing on the areas that are most significant to my research: diversity, outreach and youth theatre.

The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP) was founded in 1913 by Barry Jackson (Knighted in 1925) in Station Street, Birmingham. The company moved in 1971 to a newly built theatre on Broad Street and the original building is now known as The Old Rep (housing the Birmingham Stage Company and numerous amateur theatre groups). The new structure was designed by Graham Winteringham, and as the aim was to make it democratic the auditorium has no balconies, pillars or boxes and the stage has wide sight lines -everyone has a view and the space is shared by all.

The new location was carefully considered and much contested. Debate centred on whether it should be built in the traditional theatre area of Birmingham or the civic centre near the Town Hall and municipal buildings. There was concern that by locating the new theatre in the civic centre it would create segregation from the other theatres and a degree of cultural discrimination. However, the counter argument saw The REP's worldwide reputation as necessitating autonomy and features such as exhibition spaces and a restaurant to set it apart from other theatres. Barry Jackson, although by this time dead, had been in support of the civic site as he regarded it

“[...] an insult to put up such places [theatres] with their entrances wedged between cigarette kiosks and what are generally shops of the cheaper and vulgar variety [...] a theatre should be a place of beauty inside and out. Apart from its essential work people should want to be seen there and take a pride in going”(Barry Jackson in Cochrane, 2003, p47-48).

Winteringham was in favour of including public spaces, self-contained flats for staff and a construction that gave a sense of occasion. The civic site won out and the building was erected on Broad Street. It was the first time a theatre in this country had been given such an architecturally dominant site and it was considered to be a big risk, as Claire Cochrane notes: “Winteringham had created his ‘jewelled brooch glittering on a plain gown’ to lure

the people of Birmingham into the building and then into the auditorium, but would they come?”(Cochrane, 2003, p57).

Forty years later The REP building went dark again, this time as part of a major project to integrate with Birmingham’s new library building, improve backstage facilities, house an additional 300 seat studio theatre and dedicate the existing studio theatre to learning and participation and work in development. In the intervening time The REP is continuing to work without a building, performing in other theatres in the city and creating site specific work, the final aim being to “[...]bring a more accessible, welcoming and stimulating environment for people visiting both the library and the theatre”.<sup>11</sup>

Being the first purpose built British Repertory theatre in 1913, and now the longest surviving of the English repertory companies established at the start of the twentieth century, the many external cultural, political and economic factors impacting on The REP, combined with its employment of a large and diverse number of individuals, make it a complicated entity (Cochrane, 2003, p1, p 5 and p6).

## **Diversity and The REP**

During the 1970’s and 1980’s, representation at The REP of the experiences of residents of minoritised ethnicities were sporadic and bore varied success. In 1971 Zia Moyheddin, a Pakistani actor, played Shylock in *A Merchant of Venice*, adding a disturbing contemporary relevance to Shakespeare’s’ exploration of racism and cultural alienation, whereas in 1973 *Up Spaghetti Junction* attempted to include non-white realities but received complaints about an ill-informed account of the local Asian communities (Cochrane, 2003, p40). The play also included Nigerian Olu Jacobs, remarkably only the second non-white actor to have a role in a REP production (Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p110).

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/about/our-change-of-scenery/>

The theatre backed out of showing David Edgar's *Destiny* on the main stage in 1975, which tackled racism in the West Midlands, due to a combination of recent uneven audience figures and fears of the very political and critical nature of the piece (Cochrane, 2003, p75). However in 1977 *The Seed* was performed in the Door which focused on inter-racial marriage (Cochrane, 2003, p90). It was then not until 1985 that a production that could be considered of particular interest to a BAME audience was presented: *Mamma Decembre*, in conjunction with the black theatre company Temba, was shown in the studio (Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p110).

As I recalled from my first visit to the theatre, The REP has a policy of colour-blind or integrated casting which was introduced by John Adams in the 1980's. Harvey Young summarises the positive aspects of colour-blind casting as being symbolic of the universality of stories, providing a glimpse at a future without racism, and allowing actors to be hired based on talent rather than aesthetics; thus, "The benefits of colourblind theatre are difficult to ignore" (Young, 2013, p59). Little did I know aged 13 that the wider response to this was mixed, and included criticism from a leading black director Yvonne Brewster who declared that it was not helpful when the casting 'makes nonsense of life' (Cochrane, 2003, p141; Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p111). Young himself describes a moment similar to my own, when as an audience member he found the colour-blind casting confused his understanding of the play. Black playwright August Wilson rallied against the practice as simply perpetuating the staging of 'white' plays and not encouraging a genuine diversity in theatre work (Young, 2013, p59). However The REP's decision to adopt the policy did signal a change in approach and Davis and Fuchs, writing in 2006, state, "[...] after a somewhat belated start, there have been significant developments during the last two decades in the way The REP has more adequately reflected the multicultural realities of Birmingham and it's region, both in its casting and its programing" (2006, p114).



However, an inconsistency in theatre-going patterns in both white and minoritised ethnicity Birmingham audiences poses an on-going challenge in sustaining an audience for the theatre (Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p115). The most significant stumbling block in engaging with audiences from BAME backgrounds and representing diversity on its stage was on 18 December 2004, when hundreds of Sikh protestors attacked the theatre during its performance of *Bezhti* by Kaur Bhatti. Controversially the whole run of the studio theatre's production was cancelled for fear of the safety of audiences both of this play and the Main House Christmas production. The incident sparked fierce debate regarding free speech versus respect for religion, the best ways to consult with communities or whether to define communities monolithically at all, and the tension between encouraging new audiences whilst supporting playwrights who are keen to write drama which may be critical of their own BAME community background (Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p124).

Around this time The Rep was also engaging in the significant dialogue around race relations in theatre and was represented at the Eclipse conference by then Artistic Director Jonathan Church and the Marketing Director, Trina Jones. The theatre has since hosted Eclipse productions including *SUS in the Door* in 2010 and *The hounding of David Olawade* on the main stage in 2009, and part of The REP's current mission statement is that they aim: "[...] wherever possible, to reflect the diversity of Birmingham and the surrounding region".

By the time of this research The REP also employed a Community Engagement Officer, whose role was to engage with new audiences concentrating on BAME, disabled people and people who are socially excluded. The theatre never adopted the Arts Council race Equality Action Plan because it has always had its own diversity plan and the plan for 2010-2013 had the revised title *Diversity and Equality Action Plan*, which concentrates on Social diversity, cultural diversity and diversity around disability.

They also employed an Associate Producer with a (dissolving) suffix of BAMETI (BAME Theatre Initiative). The post had a pot of money from the Arts Council to develop BAME work which, as the Associate Producer explained to me during an interview in 2011, “[BAME work] doesn’t have to mean anything, it can be whatever we want it to be as an organisation [...] That can be with a Turkish Artist and actually with white cast and with a really mixed audience, that’s allowable under this pot of money”. She explained that she works with the concept that it involves “Diversity of form, content, approach”. Her agenda was to make the work increasingly integral to what the theatre does, rather than a separate and specifically funded approach. As she states: “I would question why continually an organisation should get a separate pot of money to develop Black and Minority Ethnic theatre. Shouldn’t it be doing that anyway? And I found nuances that mean you experiment and look at that going forward which is what I think we’re doing at The REP.”

## **History of Outreach at The REP**

As we have seen, engaging with such a diverse populace as is found in Birmingham is challenging and complex, and Davis and Fuchs credit the outreach work of The REP for the profile of the theatre in the city. They also regard that the work is rooted in a moral as well as financial obligation to draw as sizeable a non-white audience as feasible (Davis & Fuchs, 2006, p114). The history of outreach at The REP is multi-faceted and has seemingly ever-growing momentum.

From 1972 onwards there was an active community fringe group coming in and out of the studio theatre, echoing a national movement. However, there was very little dedicated outreach work until in 1987 when it became fundamental to the theatre, primarily due to the specifications of Arts Council funding. In this year Mick Yates was appointed Animateur, running pre and post -performance workshops in conjunction with the community tour, and in July 1988 brought schools to the theatre for workshops as part of

the *Theatre Focus* fortnight (Cochrane, 2003, p127-128). The following year he became Community Drama Director and worked with a Community Projects Administrator, Julia Smith, and several freelance workshop leaders running Youth Workshop Groups who performed in the studio and at the Midlands Arts Centre (the MAC) (Cochrane, 2003, p132).

In 1989, now employing Gwenda Hughes as Associate Director, who had a strong history of community theatre, The REP produced *Heartlanders* on the Main Stage featuring 300 local people. It was a multicultural production and generated a great deal of enthusiasm but, unfortunately for the participants, after it finished there was no follow up (Cochrane, 2003, p133 to 135).

Outreach work had become an integral part of The Rep; when the theatre itself had financial difficulties under Bill Alexander in the early 1990's, the chairman of the board suggested cutting the community department to save money, but Alexander argued that this was not possible since it was now fundamental to what they did (Clare Cochrane interview, 2009). Thus in 1993 a designated Community, Youth and Education Officer was employed, Joanna Read, with a brief to 'create an imaginative programme of theatre, workshop and outreach material that supports, challenges and extends the work of the theatre'. Although similar to the previous community work, this indicated a move towards more direct educational activity. This included workshops in schools and at the theatre, pre-performance 'spotlights' and post-performance 'after-dark's', resource packs and 'Page to Stage' sessions where schools were able to see texts approached by actors and directors (Cochrane, 2003, p160-161), many of which still exist as part of the current work offered by the department.

In 1998 Rachel Gartside was appointed to a new post- Head of Education -with the remit to create a new education programme embedded by strategy and policy. During an interview in 2008 she explained that her main aim was to assimilate the education work with the rest

of the theatre's work. It took a year to write an education policy and to determine the feasibility of her task. Amongst her achievements, Gartside was able to recruit an Education Officer, an administrator, a community tour co-ordinator and 3 to 4 associate freelancers. She was also able to engender a working culture where education events involved a co-ordinated and considered pedagogy. The Transmissions Festival was started with Ben Payne from the Literary Department and it was celebrated because, "[...] it was exactly the idea of work that was genuinely about young people, teaching and learning, and celebrating Birmingham [...] Involving schools that genuinely reflected the demography of the city and were multicultural". However, integrating the education department was beset with challenges, as she recalled in her interview:

"To get a lot of stuff going on that was genuinely integrated into the theatre, and not just me employing freelance people to do stuff independently of what was going on in the building, that was a very tough call [...] and looking back on it I feel like I spent most of my energy and time trying to get the organisation working together - to be inclusive".

By the time she left, however, she felt that, "There was a much better potential infrastructure. There was a better dialogue with community 'gate keepers'".

After Rachel Gartside's departure Trevelyan Wright was appointed in the role and the mission to integrate outreach work continued. Then in 2003 the appointment of Dr Steve Ball as Education Director gave a status boost to the department, as he was appointed as senior manager and he came from a high profile position on Birmingham City Council. At this point Claire Cochrane reflects that "I think it [outreach] has become more of a part of the perceived mission of the theatre, but really you are talking about a 20 year trajectory" (Clare Cochrane Interview, 2009).

By 2011 Steve Ball's job title had become Associate Director, the department employed a salaried staff of ten, and was now called Learning and Participation, as he explained to me in an interview in February 2011, "Principally because education is regarded as being synonymous with schools and we take a lifelong learning approach to education."

## **History of youth theatre at The REP**

The history of youth theatre at The REP goes back even further than outreach. In 1967 Theatre '67, a young people's theatre club, was established with a modest Arts Council Grant that aimed at cultivating a new young audience. Then in 1972 the Birmingham Youth Theatre, run by Derek Nicholls, was also given a home in the studio. In 1987 Birmingham Federation of Youth Theatre's was set up and was given a chance to share work at the theatre. In the summer of 1993 a new Youth Theatre for 16-21 year olds was established which had no auditions and met weekly in the theatre to "[...]give a greater sense of being part of The REP organisation"(Cochrane, 2003, p161), and a young writer's group was formed the same year called Write Now. In 1995 *Hot off the Page!* was a festival of work involving sixth form students and Youth Theatre members. By 2001 the Young REP was one hundred strong and each age group showcased performances.

Mat Turner worked as a youth theatre director for the Young REP from 2001 to 2003. In 2003 Tim Ford was recruited as Youth Theatre Director and restructured the groups to reflect interest rather than age so that there was now: *Musical Theatre*, *New Theatre Skills*, *New Plays* and *Juniors* (the only remaining age specific group). Satellite youth theatre groups were established the same year at two secondary schools - Small Heath School and Shenley Academy. Tim [and later other facilitators] ran weekly sessions on school premises with students from the school. Over the next decade The REP had satellite groups in several schools in Telford and at two other schools in Birmingham, but the

original two are now the only ones remaining, with the addition of a Young REP group in Harborne Academy established in 2012.

In September 2009 Hannah Phillips was recruited as Theatre and Education Officer, and with the departure of Tim Ford she became Director of Young People's Theatre. The change in title was significant and chosen by Hannah Phillips as she saw Young People's Theatre (rather than youth theatre) as being more open to possibilities, inclusive of a wider age range (up to 25) and a strong signal of moving towards new ways of practice. Hannah Phillips re-structured the centrally based Young REP back to an age based approach: 14-18 year olds in two companies (1 and 2), Juniors aged 7-11, an 11-13's group and a 16-25 year olds company. Satellite groups ran at Small Heath School, Shenley Academy and Northfield Juniors. Rhys McClelland was working as a full time youth theatre director and Rhys McClelland and Hannah Phillips directed these groups between them. Additionally there was 1<sup>st</sup> Chance, an associate company for 16-25 year old NEET's set up in 2007 which ceased to run mid-way through my field work in 2011, partly due to the funding coming to an end and partly due to other commitments of its youth theatre directors. In 2010 there were between 200- 250 members of the Young REP.

The membership fees for the central groups are £45 a term. The satellite groups are either free for members or charge a nominal £1 a session to encourage commitment to the group. There is no audition and those interested in joining are placed on a database. The database was formerly a waiting list but this was changed for equality and access purposes as Steve Ball realised that it inadvertently favoured middle class children whose parents would know about the theatre, actively seek out the waiting list and placing their child's name on it, sometimes as young as at birth.

## Youth Theatre Nationally

In order to summarise the national picture of youth theatre in England at the time of this research it is necessary to first define the term. In the 2004 report *Playing a part: the impact of youth theatre on young people's personal and social development* Hughes and Wilson summarise that "Youth theatre is a broad term used to describe a wide variety of organisations that engage young people in theatre-related activities. It takes place outside of formal education and is founded on the voluntary participation of young people" (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p58). The National Association of Youth Theatre's (NAYT) definition is very similar, but with the following addition: "Youth Theatre is a local activity rooted in the community and facilitates the creative interaction of young people. It has a youthful energy with the empowerment of young people at the core of its reason to exist".<sup>12</sup>

In Autumn 2009 NAYT released *State of the Sector*, the first issue of their twice yearly report on youth theatre provision in England. The organisation had 668 registered groups in England at this time and received back 301 completed questionnaires. From this information they concluded the following information:

### Status

53% of youth theatres are voluntary organisations and 41% are registered charities. 44% of youth theatres received funding from local authorities, 16% of youth theatres appear to receive no funding at all, whilst 43% charge membership fees. 58% of staff are volunteers, with part-time staff at 19% and full-time staff at only 16%. Other staff (e.g. contracted artists, etc.) account for only 7%. 31% of youth theatres that completed a questionnaire have no full-time or part time staff, relying solely on volunteers.

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<sup>12</sup> (NAYT website [http://www.nayt.org.uk/definition\\_principles](http://www.nayt.org.uk/definition_principles)).

## **Demographics**

In regards to membership demographics, 65% of members are female, 86% of youth theatre members nationally are white British, compared to 87% in the general population (according to the 2001 Census). 14% of youth theatre members are from Black or Minority Ethnic groups, compared to 13% in the general population. The three groups where youth theatre representation appears to be lowest compared to the 2001 Census are other white (i.e. excluding white British or white Irish), Pakistani and Indian. The three groups where youth theatre representation appears to be highest compared to the 2001 Census are mixed (white and black Caribbean), African and mixed (white and black African). 68% of youth theatres have at least one member with a disability and the average number of disabled young people per youth theatre is seven. NAYT's 2010 publication *Inclusive Youth Theatre* discovered that "Within youth theatres we surveyed, surprisingly only 39% had active strategies and policies for widening participation for under-represented populations. In the majority of cases these were targeted at Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups rather than disabled young people or other under-represented groups" (Raynsford, 2010, p7).

## **Location**

37% met in theatre buildings, 18% in Youth/community centres, 17% in a school, 13% in their own building (which the report deemed was likely to be a theatre-related building) 13% in other venues which included church halls, village halls and community centres.

## **Youth Theatre Locally**

There were 68 youth theatre's registered with NAYT in the West Midlands in 2009. The youth theatre with closest proximity to The REP building is the Crescent Youth theatre, which runs sessions on Saturday mornings with young people aged 11-19 and currently has



25 members (those interested in joining are placed on a waiting list)<sup>13</sup>. The Crescent is a 300 seat theatre with a 100 seat studio, which has charitable status and is run by 250 volunteers. It costs members £45 for a term (90 days) or £120 for the year.

*Stage 2* describe themselves as “Birmingham's biggest and busiest youth theatre”<sup>14</sup>, and they are certainly one of the best known youth theatres in the city. They have members from 7-21 years old (with the under 10's meeting in a group called *Stage 1*), they have no audition to join and accept new members every term. All new members are automatically chorus and auditions are then held for the cast of each show. They offer groups called ‘options’ which include the group rehearsing for the show, a general drama group and a skills workshop. They currently meet at Millennium Point in Birmingham city centre on Saturdays. They run regular marketing and awareness campaigns with their members, and *Stage 2* flyers and posters can always be spotted across the city. Fees are £140 per term (£100 for subsequent siblings) with a subsidy policy in place. Founded in 1988, *Stage 2* became an independent company and registered charity in 2002. They currently have 200 members across all of their options.

Stagecoach theatre arts are a private company operating on a franchise basis with franchises as far afield as Australia, South Africa and Canada. They offer three hour sessions, with an hour each on singing, dancing and acting. Their aim is “To inspire and enrich young people through the performing arts” and their motto is “An hour to sing, an hour to dance, an hour to act... a lifetime to perform”. There are Stagecoach groups based in Edgbaston, Halesowen, Sutton Coldfield and neighbouring Solihull. These are all fairly affluent areas, and the Edgbaston group is based at a private school for girls costing £324 a term for a young person aged 6-18<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.crescent-theatre.co.uk/youth\\_theatre.htm](http://www.crescent-theatre.co.uk/youth_theatre.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.stage2.org/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.stagecoach.co.uk/edgbaston.html>

## **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In investigating the interrelationships of internationalism and multiculturalism and how they impact upon the aesthetic and ethical practices of the youth theatre projects fostered by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and their potential for creating 'in-between-zones', this research explores some key sociological concepts. The interaction within and between the groups and the relationship that the groups have with the theatre prompt important questions pertaining to access, identity, culture and belonging. In order to explore these questions in the analysis section, this chapter will examine the main concepts of multiculturalism, race/ethnicity, internationalism/globalisation, class, community and space/place. I will also briefly explore literature relating to theatre, youth theatre and drama and theatre education. Having grappled with these contested and complex terms and highlighting their relevance to this research, I will then draw on them in the analysis section where appropriate.

## **Multiculturalism**

### **Definitions of multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is a highly contested term, and before I can even begin to grapple with the debates surrounding its relevance, legitimacy and impact it is first necessary to wrestle with a definition. This is no simple task, and as Anthony Giddens articulated, there is a major problem which hounds much debate around multiculturalism: the fact that '[...] it simply does not mean what most of its critics think.' (Giddens in Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p14). The term has encompassed such a vast array of theories, policies and discourses on both the left and the right that it is exceptionally difficult to pin it down (Stuart Hall cited in Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p2; Powell, 2003, p153; Gordon & Newfield, 1996, p1). One of the main stumbling blocks in dialogue about multiculturalism is the lack of clarity when discussing the term as to whether it refers to the *lived experience of diversity*, to a *political process*, or indeed to what sociologist Tariq Modood (2011) refers to as the *third level* of multiculturalism (Modood, 2011, p74) (Malik, 2010). Adding further complexity is the fact that the definition of political multiculturalism varies from country to country.

### ***Multiculturalism as a Political Strategy***

I will first take the use of the term multiculturalism to refer to a political strategy. Delanty (2010) offers a neat summary of this use of the term: "[...] multiculturalism is largely a rights-based politics of inclusion into political community" (p75). It is rooted in the migration of people to western countries from elsewhere in the world and describes the struggle and political accommodation of these people through the recognition of difference - requiring policies to be customized to accommodate diverse as well as common needs (Modood, 2007, p5 and p39). Malik takes a more cynical approach when he describes it as a way to *manage* diversity through placing people in ethnic boxes, but he affirms that this then shapes public policy (Malik, 2010).

However, even if we accept the above complimentary meanings, we then stumble on the problem that different countries have implemented different *versions* of political multiculturalism to achieve the accommodation of diversity. For example, the USA has in the past practiced egalitarian or liberal multiculturalism, otherwise known as the ‘melting pot’ model, which focuses on assimilation and the pursuit of a common way of life. However more modern policies in the USA have been in the model of radical multiculturalism, which deemed liberal multiculturalism as a failure and now demands affirmative action to redress imbalances in social justice. Canada practices liberal communitarian multiculturalism, which focuses on political rights for different groups and acknowledges that the state cannot remain neutral if it wishes to be inclusive, whereas much of British multiculturalism falls into (the former chair of the Runnymede Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain) Bikuh Parekh’s image of a salad bowl – it focuses on peaceful co-existence through official recognition of diversity, but not going so far as implementing positive programmes to empower people (Delanty, 2010, p75-79).

In the UK multiculturalism as a political form followed on from assimilationist policies from 1950-1965 and Integrationist policies from 1965-1974 (Race, 2011, p16). An assimilation policy expects a one way process of transformation, wherein immigrants adopt the host culture, whereas Integration is seen as a two way process where the host culture is somewhat transformed as well. Multiculturalism is different from Integration as it recognises not just the social reality of individuals, but also of groups, and so for example does not expect religion to be confined to private space (Modood, 2007, p47-49).

However, in terms of how far the UK went in implementing transformational multicultural policies, Delanty (2010) notes that “European multiculturalism, as it emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, was [...]merely the management of cultural diversity within the established structures”(p72).

### ***Multiculturalism as a lived experience of diversity***

Multiculturalism as a term does not always refer to the political movement described above. For example Modood (2007) considers that although multiculturalism in Britain can be regarded as the political policies implemented to accommodate and recognise diversity, it did not emerge as a political movement, but rather due to a movement of peoples (p2). The movement of peoples described by Modood means that even where countries are not sanctioning multiculturalism as a formal ideology or political schema, they are still meeting diverging claims from groups of people whose shared identities vary from the majority, and thus they are still encountering the lived experience of diversity (Kelly, 2002, p1). As Ken Livingstone (2011) states, “ Multiculturalism is therefore in the first place not a policy response but a simple description of the character of our society and the understanding we all need to have of how it is going to develop in the future, due to the nature of the world we live in” (p29). This divergence in the uses of the term, and the complications that this causes when discussing it, means that Cruz (1996) regards it as “[...] a cultural fact under siege” (p19).

### ***The third level of Multiculturalism***

Between political multiculturalism and diversity as a lived experience there is what Modood describes as the third level of multiculturalism. This interpretation of multiculturalism defines itself as the acknowledgement of cultural diversity, an incorporation and participation of ethnic minorities through reciprocally strengthened practices and methodologies with the caveat that this accommodation must be within the protection of individual rights and equal opportunities (Race, 2011, p4-5; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p4; Kymlicka, 2001, p174). This third level aims for the remaking of the whole to include those who have been previously excluded and strives for equality and a sense of belonging for all (Modood, 2011, p74). It is brought about through anti-racist struggles by people *outside* of government: struggles in the community, in schools, in trade

unions etc. and these struggles encompass the everyday battles and moments of historic significance. These often go on to inform official policy, but in a piecemeal way rather than from an over-arching official political strategy, and through the demands of people living the experience of diversity rather than due to a government ideology (Mahamdallie, 2011, p24-25).

Having begun to explore the many definitions of multiculturalism I will now consider how it has been problematised by considering the arguments that reject it and those that remain in support of it.

### **Troubling Multiculturalism**

Britain has had a vast array of policies which could be seen to come under the heading of multiculturalism, but, unlike Canada or the USA, there has never been a single state doctrine to help define it (Mahamdallie, 2011, p21). However, it is often discussed as though there has been, and this then means that an 'attack' can be mounted on what David Cameron referred to as the 'discredited doctrine of state multiculturalism' (Daily Mail, 26 February 2008 in Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p7).

In recent years multiculturalism has been rejected by a number of influential figures and theorists. Civic disturbances in Britain in 2001 were followed by the Cantle Report, which was reported to lay blame for the troubles on the claim that communities were living parallel lives (Race, 2011, p47). The report was in actual fact ambiguous (which I will discuss in more detail later) but this ambiguity meant that, according to Rattansi (2011), the government was able to cherry-pick the parts which lay the blame at the non-integration of minoritised ethnicities and tailor policy according to its own pre-existing agenda (p93). This general trend to blame immigrant communities for civic disturbances was exacerbated when, following the bombings in London in July 2005, Trevor Phillips (2005) (chair of the Commission of Racial Equality (CRE)) declared that multiculturalism

“[...]is now out of date for it makes a fetish of difference instead of encouraging minorities to be truly British”(2005). His phrase that Britain was “sleepwalking into segregation” stood out, and the speech signalled a move towards integrationist rather than multicultural policy ideas (Race, 2011, p41 and p50). At the same time left wing writer Keenan Malik made similar arguments against multicultural policy, most famously that “[...] multiculturalism has helped segregate communities far more effectively than racism”(Modood *et al.*, 2006b, p48). Due to the criticism levelled at multiculturalism currently, politicians to the right and left of centre prefer to distance themselves from it; for example in 2002 the sociologist, ethnologist and consultant to the government, Stephen Vertovec, was told by the head speech-writer for the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, that ““the minister will never use “the M-word” again.””(Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p14).

The rejection of multiculturalism is mounted on a variety of grounds and the confusion regarding the definition means that when a declaration such as “Multiculturalism is dead” is made by the Daily Mail (on 7th July 2006 in Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p1) it is difficult for the reader to know whether this is a rejection of the *political policy* of multiculturalism or the *lived experience of diversity*. Often in the media the term works as a euphemism for racist hostility towards immigrants of South Asian, Africa Caribbean, North African and Turkish descent, and this confusion over what is really being referred to produces significant tension (Rattansi, 2011). Thus, although not drastically altering policies, these attacks have agitated a negative atmosphere surrounding BAME citizens by the implication that they reject the accommodation of difference and thus reject those who would be classed as different (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p27). Malik (2010) highlights this confusion and makes the parameters of his rejection clear:

“[... ] we need to separate the debate about immigration and diversity, on the one hand, from that about multiculturalism, on the other – and defend the one, but oppose the other. The lived experience of diversity has been good for Britain. Multiculturalism has been bad”(Malik, 2010).

However, is it really possible to have a lived experience of diversity without multiculturalism? If multiculturalism in Britain is not a political policy (like USA or Canada) but rather the constant striving for the respect and accommodation of different cultures via anti-discrimination laws and everyday acceptance and celebration of differences, then can it be seen as *bad* whilst saying that the lived experience of diversity is *good*? If this is what multiculturalism is, then to take it away you would have to both erase history and declare that it was OK to discriminate on the grounds of race or ethnicity (Holborne in Mahamdallie, 2011, p54). In response to David Cameron’s infamous speech declaring multiculturalism dead, Zita Holbourne wrote the poem *Multiculturalism* in which she clearly sees multiculturalism as positive - the lived experience of diversity - and not something that can be declared finished by a politician. The poem climaxes with the following defiant lines (italics and capital letters in original):

*You can’t erase what makes us who we are!*

It’s not something you can permit or bar!

And you can’t take away what brings us *together*

REGOGNISE Mr Prime Minister

MULTICULTURALISM’S here forever! (Holbourne in Mahamdallie, 2011, p103)

Below I will explore some of the accusations levelled at multiculturalism and present the arguments that are in support of them and those that deny them.



### ***'Multiculturalism segregates and causes conflict'***

The accusation that multiculturalism had caused fragmentation rather than integration gathered force after the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (7/7) bombings as discussed above (Modood, 2007, 10-12). The alleged allocation of resources based on ethnicity was accused of setting groups against one another, and plurality was accused of being dangerous and anti-progressive (Malik, 2010; Malik, 2002; Gordon & Newfield, 1996, p8). The fear of plurality is rooted in the notion that once minority rights are recognised it leads down a path of ghettoisation, and major changes to the nation's administration, such as the adoption of Sharia Law in the UK (Kymlicka, 2001, p7; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p8-11). However, these arguments rely on the belief that multiculturalism aims to create cultures which are segmented from one another, an assertion that many defenders of multiculturalism debunk – they argue it was never about encouraging segregation, rather finding non-discriminatory ways to achieve social and cultural participation (Sen, 2007, p156, p40; Rattansi, 2011). This counter argument states that the Cantle Report, which is heralded by anti-multiculturalists as laying the blame for the 2001 riots at the feet of multiculturalism, in actual fact *did not* blame multiculturalism and rather calls for *more* of it (Rattansi, 2011, p73 and 74). Segregation, multicultural proponents argue, is more likely to be caused by people not feeling that their way of life is valued and thus retreating from civic participation for self-protection. Therefore, by celebrating different cultures people from those cultural backgrounds are more likely to feel part of society (Livingstone in Mahamdallie, 2011, p36). Former leader of the Respect Party and former Birmingham City Councillor Salma Yaqoob believes that the argument that multiculturalism has caused segregation has been successfully discredited. She cites research from the University of Manchester that areas with higher ethnic diversity have more social cohesion, respect and conviviality and research from the University of Southampton that poverty is six times more likely than ethnicity to cause suspicion amongst neighbours (Yaqoob, 2011, p167, 176

and 177). Indeed the Cantle Report itself actually emphasised a desire by Asian residents to mix which is then hampered by white racism, as well as highlighting that the role of poverty and scarcity of resources was as much if not more to blame than the oft touted segregation of communities (Rattansi, 2011, p74; Modood, 2011).

Is a lack of inter community mixing really as big a problem as has been made out anyway?

Dorling (2011) points out that people tend not to mix from one area to another area, regardless of ethnicity, and that this should not be a problem as long as people from these areas are not pitted against one another (p98). He also goes on to note that where people live tends to follow a similar pattern for all migrant communities – starting in inner city cheaper housing and then moving out to better housing when they can afford to do so, and this, he argues, is nothing new (p101). It is also interesting to note that it is not all communities who are being encouraged to mix or seen as problematic if they do not, as in actual fact most Muslims are more integrated than the British upper classes, a group which are never the target of policy aimed at integration (Mahamdallie, 2011, p21; Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p8). Furthermore, whilst criticizing segregation, the coalition government have made social movement much more difficult through cuts which disproportionately affect the working classes and migrants (such as Education Maintenance Allowance and access to English language classes) and thus leave people more isolated (Rosen, 2011, p121).

When referring to his claim of 'sleepwalking into segregation', Trevor Phillip's coined the term 'index of dissimilarity' to describe the (in his view) lack of cohesion in multi-ethnic Britain (Phillips, 2005). However, Richard Race (2011) problematises this and offers an alternative concept by expanding it beyond minority communities to encompass a broad trend towards online social environments. He believes this promotes a general sense of segregation which is not due to the actions of minority communities or multicultural

policies, rather a common shift in the way we communicate with one another. Thus Race offers the term 'discourse of strangers' as an alternative ( p53).

***'Multiculturalism undermines equality'***

Another argument that encircles multiculturalism is whether it works *with* or *against* equality, or the potential contradiction between group and individual rights. Firstly there is the disagreement regarding the *best* way to achieve equality. Some theorists have argued that social equality is gained through the recognition of people's distinct cultures, whilst others have disputed this and declare that equality must be rooted in economics and thus is gained through a re-distribution of wealth. Secondly, there is disagreement about whether recognition of distinct cultures compromises individual rights for the sake of group rights.

These differences of opinion have their roots in the perceived conflict between Equal Dignity and the Politics of Difference. Charles Taylor, the philosopher whose work on Politics of Recognition is seminal, describes the conflict thus: the case for Equal Dignity rebukes the Politics of Difference for breaching the codes of non-discrimination and in turn the Politics of Difference admonishes the case for Equal Dignity for nullifying identity and inflicting uniformity upon people (Taylor in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p42). It has been argued that equality has been sacrificed in the name of diversity by accepting that things stay as they are and are not challenged and as thus maintaining unequal power relationships within groups by characterizing them as equally different (Malik, 2002; Davis, 1996, p44). Thus the conflict between universal rights and protecting group interests has been seen by many as immovable, and the question of whether multiculturalism had been successful in empowering minorities was thrown very much into doubt by the mid 1990's (Harris, 1998, p449; Powell, 2003, p153).

However, the dilemma at the heart of this disparity is that many minority groups need to *both* negate and assert their particularity in order to gain recognition *and* redistribution of wealth and to thus obtain equality (Fraser, 1998, p24). Economic and cultural disadvantage often go hand in hand as the critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1998) states, “[...] racist and Eurocentric cultural norms are institutionalized in the state and the economy while the economic disadvantages suffered by people of color restrict their ‘voice’”(p30). Whilst the debate has raged back and forth regarding which of the two is the most effective way to achieve equality, the idea has emerged that rather than being opposing strategies, *both* are fundamentally interlinked and necessary. It has been reasoned that recognition can play a fundamental role in achieving economic and political equality and that subordinated groups want their culture acknowledged as distinct as well as being seen as equal (Young, 1998, p60; Blum, 1998, p88). Parekh declares unwaveringly that people are individuals AND members of groups, and Tariq Modood states most succinctly that equal dignity and equal respect are both vital to multiculturalism (Parekh, 2000; Modood, 2007, p51). Thus the support for particularity and universality can be seen as integral to positive identity formation (Crockefeller in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p97).

This equality debate is then further complicated by the issues of equality *within* the groups who are demanding rights. As political scientist and philosopher Seyla Benhabib (2002) states, “the tension and, in many cases, the moral dilemma between accommodating difference and doing justice to all members of a minority group propels contemporary discussions of multiculturalism into a new phase” (p104). Sociologist Ali Rattansi (2011) disputes the conflict between group and individual rights by expressing that although a group can be given the right to do something, the individuals from that group choose to then take this up and are not (or should not) be forced to do so by the group (p3). Thus, in his opinion, the individual and group rights are not in conflict. However this still leaves open the concern around the way that groups are identified, and I will examine this in more

detail in the next section as I explore the complications that multiculturalism throws up with regard to how culture and cultures are perceived and valued.

### ***'Multiculturalism misunderstands 'Culture''***

Another key contention in the debate surrounding multiculturalism is the understanding of culture itself, as the philosopher Gayatri Spivak succinctly notes: "[...]the multiculturalist's many cultures cannot be captured by some textbook definition [...] Simply put, culture is always on the run, always changeable" (1999, 355)" (Spivak cited in Powell, 2003, p157). A strong argument levied at the multicultural camp is that it defines cultures from the outside as homogenous wholes, when from within they are anything but (Benhabib, 2002, p5 and p61). This leads to the belief that diversity is something that merely happens between rather than within cultures, which many declare to be a falsity, as Benhabib (2002) notes: "Cultural identities in complex, pluralist democratic societies should seek public recognition of their specificity in ways that do not deny their fluidity" (p184). The complexity of cultures and accompanying misplaced holistic assumptions lead many to regard any aim for an *equality of cultures* as meaningless (Blum, 1998, p75; Benhabib, 2002, p58). It also leads to the argument that terms such as *cultural diversity* are tautologies:

"The notion of cultural diversity in its current administrative form does not rightly acknowledge that culture within itself is already an assemblage of difference, diverse tendencies and unresolved tensions, but is instead focused primarily on the strains of separation between cultures." (Appignanesi, 2010, p5)

It has been argued that the belief that cultures are homogenous leads to the assumption that they are static. This in turn leads to the notion of cultural conservatism which can trap people in a lifestyle that they may not wish to be in, which is of course particularly problematic when considering the rights of women and children (Sen, 2007, p114 and p116). Benhabib (2002) argues strongly that, "[...] intercultural justice between human

groups should be defended in the name of justice and freedom and not an elusive preservation of cultures”(p7). A discussion around the complexities of identity formation springs from this as many of the attacks against multiculturalism are based on what is seen as a normative approach to classification of identities (Benhabib, 2002, p18). Neglecting the complex ways in which identities are formed, it instead reduces the social situation of someone to a simplistic form using culture as synonym for identity. (Appiah in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p155; Sen, 2007, p177; Benhabib, 2002, p1). Instead, it is argued, the culture aspect of one’s life is important but it is part of the *context* of identity formation and not the whole story, an issue which I will discuss in more detail later when I explore race and ethnicity (Appiah in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p160; Kelly, 2002, p8). Also, by placing culture into neatly defined categories, it is contended that much of the interactive and transformative facets of culture are lost (Gutmann in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p7). However, Modood argues that the interactive facet of culture is a key component of multiculturalism, and that these arguments are simply labouring under a false definition of the term.

This perceived misunderstanding of culture has more recently been blamed for creating ‘cultural apartheid’. This emotive term was used by David Cameron to accuse multiculturalism of creating a dangerous segregation, but it is not just in Conservative political talk that the term has taken hold. In the recent Arts Council publication by Third text, *Beyond Cultural Diversity*, Appignanesi (2010) refers to Arts Council policies (which he believes reflect general societal policies) of cultural diversity as “deliberate fragmentation which results from a policy of disturbingly near-likeness to cultural apartheid. Diversity is not – and can never be - the same as equality but only a segregationist hindrance to it”(p9). I will discuss this shift in thinking in more detail later.

### ***'We need an alternative to multiculturalism'***

It is not surprising that given the contested and confused nature of the word multiculturalism, governments no longer make official use of this term and many theorists have called for an alternative. Below I will discuss some of the key alternatives that have been offered.

### **Cultural Diversity**

In government lexicon *Cultural Diversity* was widely used to replace the word multiculturalism but, as I have discussed above, it was contested and accused of being as tautologising and homogenizing as the multiculturalism that preceded it (Appignanesi, 2010, p5). It also begs the question, "[...]why is there an officially differentiated category of diverse cultures for some citizens who are undeniably in the fabric of British society?" (Appignanesi, 2010, p5). Consequently, it has now been displaced in official language as I will discuss below.

### **Diversity**

As Cultural Diversity was to multiculturalism before it, *diversity* has now become the official term which replaces cultural diversity (Race, 2011, p57). Responding to many of the concerns discussed above, it is still aimed at reducing discrimination and encouraging participation, but it sees difference in an individual rather than communal way and includes other differences such as sexuality and disability (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p18 and 19). Significantly, in the document *'Improving opportunities, Strengthening Society: The Government's Strategy to Increase Race Equality and Community Cohesion'* HO 2005, Multiculturalism as a term is not present but diversity is (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010, p14 and 18).

## **Cosmopolitanism**

In addition to government bodies, many theorists have approached the issue of where to go next with multiculturalism. Notably, Appiah (2007) has put the case for the term *Cosmopolitanism*, a term originally coined by 4<sup>th</sup> century Cynics which rejected the idea of an individual belonging to a community of communities, and posited the idea of an individual being a citizen of the cosmos (pxiv). He describes cosmopolitanism as consisting of two strands, the first being obligation to others beyond kith, kin and shared citizenship, and the second being an interest in the particularity of human lives. He states that this will not always be a harmonious process but that disagreements are a legitimate challenge to approach through dialogue, argument, and not necessarily agreement. Rather what is important is the engagement, the interest in one another and the journey that this takes us all on. In summary he says “[...]cosmopolitanism is, in a slogan, universality plus difference[...]

 (Appiah, 2007, p151). Modood (2011) explains the difference between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism is that multiculturalism has groups as a critical feature whereas cosmopolitanism valorises difference but groups are not politically recognised - diversity is thus individually chosen (p67). I will return to this term when I explore internationalism and globalisation.

## **Interculturalism**

*Interculturalism* is described by its proponents as the necessary evolution of multiculturalism. Michael Rosen (2011), in an article first published in the Socialist Review, stated: “I think we have to go further than that [multiculturalism] and celebrate interculturalism – which is ultimately a part of internationalism”(p119). Like Cosmopolitanism it highlights the necessity of dialogue, interaction, a recognition of what is already shared between cultures, a recognition of differences and an understanding that consensus does not need to be reached. It is instead a deliberative democratic model which also recognises that it does not negate the role of socio-economics, racism and



unequal power relations and will require adequate funding and patience (fye cited in Race, 2011, p111; Benhabib, 2002, p71; Rattansi, 2011).

### **Multiculturalism with an emphasis on shared culture**

The influential multicultural theorist Tarik Modood argues that, rather than an alternative to multiculturalism, what is needed is an emphasis on the shared culture aspect that he believes already exists in the *third way* version of multiculturalism as discussed above. This shared culture element demands a rethinking of the national story and the national identity, which respects and incorporates the identities that are valued by people, and is produced through on-going debate and discussion (Modood, 2007, pp150, 152, 153; Modood, 2011). Drawing on the writings of literary theorist Terry Eagleton, McFarlane (2011) argues that this rethinking of “Britishness” is essential in terms of equality, because historically what has constituted *British Culture* has been decided and imposed by the ruling classes. Rather, Eagleton states that “[...] a common culture in a more radical sense of the term is not one in which everyone believes the same thing, but one in which everyone has equal status in cooperatively determining a way of life in common” (Eagleton in McFarlane, 2011, p124). It is this way of determining a shared identity for a nation that Parekh (2000) supports, and through this version of multiculturalism he declares that we need, “[...] a broad set of shared values that leave room for difference” (Parekh, 2000).

### **My definition of Multiculturalism**

Having explored what multiculturalism means I will now state that my use of it in the remainder of this work is thus: it refers to the lived experience of diversity which results from the fact of migration and globalisation/internationalism (two terms I will discuss in detail below). It takes into account the backdrop of multicultural policies in the UK and the principles of accommodating individual and community needs within a liberal polity, but its primary function as a word in this research is of the *lived experience of diversity*.

## **Race, ethnicity and identity**

### **Introduction**

It is impossible to employ the lens of multiculturalism, as the lived experience of diversity, without tackling the problematic concepts of *race* and *ethnicity*. It is not within the scope of this research to explore in depth these exceptionally complicated terms, but it is vital that I consider basic definitions and how they are used in most contemporary discourse. The legitimacy of continuing to use such terms has been thrown into doubt by many theorists and defended by others; therefore I will examine the complexity that the words embody and explore the arguments on both sides. I will also consider the connection to the term identity. Although my research does not deeply explore identity, the framing of the focus through multiculturalism necessitates that identity and its construct be acknowledged and problematised, as I will discuss below.

### **Definitions of race and ethnicity**

Sociologist Stephen Fenton (2003) notes that fellow sociologists Glazer and Moynihan popularised the term ethnicity in the 1960's, and it was from this point that it began to combine with, and to some extent replace, the term race (p91). Gunaratnam (2003) summarises the difference in the two words in the following way: "The much used general conceptual distinction between 'race' and ethnicity is that 'race' evokes a biological and genetic referent, and ethnicity refers to cultural and religious difference and Kinship" (p4). Around a similar time that the term ethnicity was spreading in its usage, the term *identity* was being utilized in social psychology when discussing the features of people such as their "[...] race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, or sexuality" (Appiah, 2005, p65).

The biological argument for race has long been discredited and replaced with the acknowledgment, by most, that race is in fact a social construct (Baumann, 1996, p17).

However, the widespread replacement of the term race with ethnicity as described above

is not without its problems. Whether ethnicity is any more *real* than race is hotly contested. However, both Modood and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah articulate a compromise which acknowledges the socially constructed nature of ethnicity whilst also recognizing that just because it is socially constructed it does not make it any less real to the people experiencing it (Modood, 2007, p91; Appiah, 2007, p135). As sociologist Avtar Brah (1996) explores, ethnicity tells us about the lived experiences of people in social and cultural situations, and as such can be seen in the same way as class or gender. Whilst troubling closed categorisation of ethnicity, she acknowledges its presence and urges us to be aware of the power relations within and between these categorisations and what this signifies (p241).

### **Troubling race and ethnicity**

There is a key dilemma which presents itself when trying to tackle racism and inequality. As Fraser (1998) puts it, “how can anti-racist groups fight to abolish ‘race’ and to valorise racialised groups specifically?”(p31). Categorisation of people is often used as a way to try and ensure that groups, and individuals within those groups, are not being disadvantaged, but as Appiah (2005) notes, as soon as a category is defined it can then have the effect of calcifying and thus fixing an identity permanently - what he calls *Medussa syndrome* (p110).

Social researcher Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) explores the friction created by needing the above categories to undertake transformative research (by for example highlighting inequalities) and realising that they are historical and social constructs. She draws our attention to the dilemma that even as we try and dismantle unequal power relations, we risk recreating them (p18 and p32-33). With these dilemmas in mind I will now examine the arguments both for and against using categories of ethnicity.

### ***Arguments against the use of the terms race and ethnicity***

Philosopher and economist Amartya Sen (2007) is critical of the result of classifying the world into religions and civilisations, as he believes that it results in “[...] amorphous one size fits all identities”(p6). Moreover, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1996) argues that the categorisation of people into ethnic communities is a colonial tool of dominance which limits boundary crossing and preserves the power of the elite (p29-30) - a point which Hamilton (1996) supports when she cautions that when we use the terms we lose sight of “[...]the historic use of race and ethnicity as a cover for relations of economic domination” (p168).

As mentioned above, Brah (1996) regards ethnicist discourses as operating with stereotypes and over generalizations, instead urging us to explore how and why specific binaries are constructed, and to interrogate “[...] how these signifiers slide into one another in the articulation of power” (p185 and p100). Therefore, where she does see categorisations as useful is in highlighting where, how and to what ends they have been used. This should then be used to unpick these categories as part of a process of politically challenging the privileges or disadvantages that these categorisations have engendered (Brah, 1996, p245).

Advocates of cosmopolitanism encourage that instead of reifying categories of ethnicity, which they regard as unhelpful, it is crucial to work towards an understanding of individual preference , manifold memberships and an ethics of cohabitation (Noble, 2009, p46; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002, p8 and p18).

### ***Arguments in support of using the terms race and ethnicity***

However, Modood (2007) denies that by having categories of ethnicity we ossify people's identities. He argues that we can discuss these terms without being overly prescriptive, and that just because there will be internal variation, this does not refute the existence of such

groups. Rather he defends these generalizations as useful sociologically and politically just, as long as it is recognised that, within the groups, there is room for differentiation and complexity (p97, p119 and p120).

Sociologist Steven Garner (2007), in his book *Whiteness: an introduction*, makes a strong case for being *more* rather than *less* concerned with race. He articulates that whiteness is most frequently seen as a raceless, neutral state, whilst others are racialised and collectivised (p4, p36 and p37). Garner argues that it is important to recognise whiteness as a race in order to strip, “[...] a normative privileged identity of its cloak of invisibility” (2007, p5). As Gunaratnam (2003) notes, race and ethnicity do resonate with aspects of lived experience and it is hard to claim racism without the idea of race (p32-33). Radical feminist, social activist and author bell hooks (1992) is adamant that mutual recognition of racism is absolutely crucial for meaningful and honest encounters between people of different backgrounds, and that feminist activists are articulating that the only way to eradicate white supremacy is to concede positive recognition and accept the existence of difference (p28).

### **Moving forwards**

These discussions leave the terms race and ethnicity in a difficult space. However, there are suggestions from various theorists as to how to move forwards and avoid being forever trapped in a semantic whirlpool or from throwing the baby out with the bathwater. An acknowledgment that identities are complex and fluid is advocated by, amongst others, Avtar Brah, Amartya Sen and Seyla Benhabib (Brah, 1996, p197; Sen, 2007, p16; Benhabib, 2002, p75 and p184). Benhabib (2002) calls for recognition of the plurality and complexity of our identities which, whilst seeking recognition, do not repudiate their fluidity. She argues that self-identification should be more of a determining factor than classifications imposed on you by others, and she calls this “[...] a post-national, egalitarian democratic

vision of modernist cultural vistas" (p 80). Indeed, Modood (2007) notes that self-identification can be a political act , for example defining oneself as black (p111).

The concepts of race and ethnicity can be approached in transformative ways, such as through Critical Race Theory (CRT) which "[...]sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better"(Delgado and Stefancic cited in Race, 2011, p111). Gunaratnam (2003) uses the concept of *doubled research* to work with the hypothesis that race is operating 'under erasure' - doubled research challenges established categories whilst also acknowledging lived experiences with an aim of social transformation (p35). As I will discuss later, the key is that where there are necessary moments of closure in concepts of ethnic categories for transformative purposes, these should always be re-opened, re-examined and never taken for granted (Gunaratnam, 2003, p38).

## **Identity**

One of the ways to maintain fluid categories is through using the concept of identity rather than ethnicity, although this is not without its own problems. As Appiah (2005) notes, "I have often found it helpful to supplant talk of 'race' or 'culture' with talk of identity; but I should admit, pre-emptively that talk of identity, too, can have reifying tendencies"(pxvi).

The mass migration of people has had an impact on how we perceive identities.

Sociologists Newfield and Gordon argue that multiculturalism has allowed us to see the elasticity and permeability of group boundaries and intersectionality of identities, while Brah and post-colonial theorist R. Radhakrishnan explain that travel changes both the identities of the travellers and the 'host' country, demonstrating that identity is always fluid even when it appears to be fixed (Newfield & Gordon, 1996, p78; Radhakrishnan, 2003, p126; Brah, 1996, p194 and 197).

The fluidity of identities is demonstrated by Modood with the terms: black – Bangladeshi – British Asian, which could all refer to the same person at different times or in different circumstances (Modood, 2007, p105). It is this complexity that leads Wetherell et al to note that, “Identities are shifting, multiple and at times deeply saturated with emotion”(Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p11).

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall urges us to think of identity as a ‘production’ which is always in process, and Radhakrishnan, like Benhabib, aspires that in the future this identity formation will not be bestowed upon us by official decree, but instead be self-ascribed through complex negotiation (Hall, 2003, p234; Radhakrishnan, 2003, p129).

Of course it is important to note that identities, even when chosen by ourselves, are done so from the options given to us. As Appiah (1994) notes, “We make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we chose” (p155). Appiah draws our attention to the fact that we can only choose from the options provided by state, religion, family and peers, whilst Stuart Hall frames this within the discourses of history and culture (Hall, 2003, p237). With this in mind, Jon Cruz (1996) articulates that identities are made within social limits, ascribed with historic and social meaning, and therefore he considers that it is important to assess, “[...] identity formations as social hieroglyphics.” (p25- 26).

### **How I will use the terms race, ethnicity and identity**

Therefore, considering what I have discussed above, it will be necessary for me to at times work within fixed ethnic categories in order to explore the lived experience of diversity in the context of my research. However, I will be aware of the fluidity, intersectionality, historic and social significance of these categories, and as Gunaratnam (2003) advocates, by using the practice of doubled research I will not allow these categories to be kept closed throughout (p38). I will discuss in more detail the ways in which I will approach identity

within my research in my methodology section, including the use of identity descriptors provided by participants (inspired by the work of Kathleen Gallagher). The terms race, ethnicity and multiculturalism which I have discussed above are all closely connected to internationalism and globalisation, and I will discuss these concepts in the following section.



# **Internationalism and Globalisation**

## **Introduction**

As this research investigates the interrelationship of internationalism and multiculturalism, it is now important to examine the term internationalism. Like many of the terms that I have discussed thus far, internationalism is complex and multifaceted. It is often either linked with or conversely contrasted against the terms globalisation and cosmopolitanism (Rebellato, 2009, p60). In this section I will explore definitions of internationalism, globalisation and cosmopolitanism, and examine how they intersect, overlap and diverge. I will also consider some of the key issues which emerge when borders are opened, trade is international and there is widespread migration of people. These include the concept of diaspora, how identities are formed and the role of technology. The significant factors of how we conceive of space and community will be explored in separate sections. I will also briefly explore some of the arguments levied by both opponents and advocates of globalisation.

## **Definition of Internationalism**

Internationalism can be regarded as a drive for political collaboration between different countries on a governmental level, and a desire to strengthen international negotiation and economic interaction (Holbraad, 2003, p2; Lemke cited in Preuss & Liese, 2011, p76; Jones in Cambridge & Thompson, 2001, p9). On a social and cultural level, internationalism can be seen to embody intercultural dialogue and an endeavour towards goodwill between states (Preuss & Liese, 2011, p76).

As I undertook this research it became apparent that, in the context of the specific case studies undertaken, internationalism (as defined above) did not have such a strong interaction with multiculturalism as was first thought. However, the term globalisation did have much greater resonance with multiculturalism. Also, the term cosmopolitanism

embodied some of the key principles of the work that was being undertaken. I will explore the reasons for this below, but firstly I will investigate how globalisation links to and departs from the idea of internationalism, and will then do the same for cosmopolitanism.

### **Definition of globalisation**

Internationalism is often contrasted with a definition of globalisation which sees globalisation as concerned with free trade and profit and internationalism as concerned with intergovernmental structures and global peace (Jones in Cambridge & Thompson, 2001, p9). Globalisation is a term used in manifold and contrasting ways. Appiah (2007) dismisses the word as no longer useful when he sums up its multiplicity of meanings thus: “[...] ‘globalization’ – a term that once referred to a marketing strategy, and then came to designate a macroeconomic thesis, and now can seem to encompass everything, and nothing” (pxiii). Playwright and academic Dan Rebellato (2009) highlights that the word has been seen to concern areas as diverse as : greater awareness of the world, culture, conflict, politics and economics, and he insists it is merely the latter – an economic phenomenon (p4-10). He sees the former areas to be the arena of cosmopolitanism, which I will discuss in detail below. Often globalisation is seen as a process of westernisation, but Sen (2007) critiques this as a misappropriation of the word, stating that it is not in fact new or to be feared. Rather, he advocates that the flow of ideas between cultures has always been crucial, although again this could be seen to refer more to cosmopolitanism than globalisation (p124).

### **Definition of Cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitanism, like globalisation, is a term which can be seen to both resonate with and deviate from Internationalism. As I discussed in the section pertaining to multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism is a concept stretching back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is advocated by theorists such as Appiah, Held and Rebellato, and is predicated on the idea that all people

are equal and part of a single world-wide community; that we all have obligations to other people regardless of background; that dialogue between people of different backgrounds is crucial but does not have to end in agreement and that identity is fluid (Appiah, 2007, p xv; Held, 2002, p57-58; Rebellato, 2009, p60). The overlap between the terms cosmopolitanism and globalisation is noted by applied drama theorist and practitioner Helen Nicholson (2011), who observes that the type of global citizenship often advocated by humanitarian organisations and schools is more akin to cosmopolitanism than globalisation (p157). She distinguishes that globalization aims to make parts of the world more wealthy, whereas cosmopolitanism wants to make the world better. Crucially, she differentiates between the homogenization of products (globalisation) and a resistance to homogeneity through the acceptance of difference (cosmopolitanism) (Nicholson, 2011, p157). Rebellato (2009), seeing globalisation as economic, holds up cosmopolitanism as it's antithesis (p11).

Where cosmopolitanism and internationalism deviate, according to the economist Carsten Holbraad (2003), is that cosmopolitanism overrides the idea of nation states and does not concern itself with international relations (p2). However, political theorist David Held (2002) contradicts this view, clarifying that cosmopolitanism accepts that states and political communities are important but are not absolutes (p57). Rebellato (2009) supports this view when he states that cosmopolitans are highly concerned with international law, advocating that nations should relinquish some authority in order to take part in a cosmopolitan community (p60).

### **How Internationalism relates to this research**

As the definitions above demonstrate, there is considerable overlap and disagreement over what each of these terms mean. Therefore when one theorist is referring to globalisation,

another theorist would define their discussion as relating to cosmopolitanism or internationalism. It is thus important to define what it is that this research is referring to.

Birmingham is, as The REP's Associate Director Steve Ball notes, "a great international city"<sup>16</sup>. The REP, standing next to the International Convention Centre (ICC), takes its international reputation seriously. By touring productions such as *The Snowman* (2009) to Seoul in South Korea, and collaborating with Japan and Korea on *Looking for Yoghurt* (2009), the theatre aims to contribute to "[...] the continued international reputation of our (Birmingham's) cultural industries"<sup>17</sup>. The theatre sees its REP100 digital archive project as having international as well as local and national importance<sup>18</sup>.

There have also been international projects involving young people, such as the exchange between Telford Young Rep and young people in Calgary in Canada - a project which I discussed with the playwright and youth theatre director who organised it. However, it became apparent in the process of this research that taking internationalism to most commonly define interaction between different countries (be it politically or culturally), internationalism has less of an interrelationship with multiculturalism than globalisation does. Also because the case study groups that I focused on did not partake in any international exchanges, internationalism was not particularly relevant to the research. Global migrations, which largely occur due to economics (but also natural disasters and conflict), result in multicultural societies such as Birmingham. Thus, as globalisation creates the lived experience of diversity, the interaction between globalisation and multiculturalism is very pertinent to this research.

Interactions by Young REP participants in the case study groups (in real time and space or through the uses of technologies such as the internet), which are so pertinent to

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/news/future-vision/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/about/mission/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/news/news/the-reps-100-year-history-comes-to-life/>

internationalism, quite probably did happen during the research process. However, they will have occurred outside of The REP's involvement. They therefore are more closely linked to globalisation and the resulting diasporas, which I will discuss in more detail below.

If globalisation is the cause of the lived experience of diversity (or multiculturalism), then the cosmopolitan principles of dialogue, mutual respect and equality provide a set of philosophies to ethically shape interactions between these diverse communities. They also strongly relate to core ideologies of drama and the ways that participants in the Young REP were encouraged to interact within and between groups, both of which I will explore in my analysis.

### **Diaspora**

A key fact of global capitalism is the movement of people for economic reasons, both from country to country and from rural to urban areas (Kymlicka, 2001, p275-276). The movement of peoples results in the formation of diaspora, whose members have multifaceted identities inside and outside of national borders (Brazier & Mannur, 2003, p5; Modood *et al.*, 2006a, p15). Diasporas have shaped multicultural cities like Birmingham, and technology holds a significant role in the maintenance of these communities. As I discussed in the section regarding race, ethnicity and identity, migration has an important impact on identity formation, as Brazier and Mannur (2003) highlight:

“Diasporic subjects are marked by hybridity and heterogeneity – cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national – and these subjects are defined by a traversal of the boundaries demarking nation and diaspora [...] this hybridity opens diasporic subjectivity to a liminal, dialogic space wherein identity is negotiated[...]” (p5).

Globalisation means that ethnicity has become global rather than just local. This has resulted in many positive outcomes, such as more fluid identities and connections between the universal and the particular (Appadurai, 2003, p39; Cohen 1997:170 cited in Edwards &

Usher, 2000, p39). However such identity production can be politicised and can also lead to fear by some of divided loyalties (this is especially true of fears regarding Islamic diaspora)(Appadurai, 2003, p42; Modood *et al.*, 2006b, p15).

### **Role of technology**

Technology has played a significant role in changing the way that we relate to people in other parts of the world, altering the importance that time and space have on interactions and influencing the way that people's identities and opinions develop (Appelbaum, 1997, p301; Edwards & Usher, 2000, p43; Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p283). Political theorist David Held (2002) neatly summarises the multiple impacts of a wide variety of technologies when he notes:

“The global diffusion of radio, television, the internet, satellite and digital technologies has made instantaneous communication possible, rendered many border check and controls over information ineffective, and exposed an enormous constituency to diverse cultural outputs and values” (p49).

The facilitation of diasporas has been greatly aided by technology, both in terms of linking those from the same ethnic or cultural background now living elsewhere and in the creation of new diasporas based on interest groups, personal characteristics or political allegiances (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p285). However, it is important to remember that these technologies are not available to everybody, and are strongly linked to a degree of economic affluence (Rebellato, 2009, p39). There are also theories which highlight that although these technologies may link people who are geographically distant, they can also be accused of socially segregating us on more local levels by replacing face to face interactions (Race, 2011, p51-52)

## **Fears about globalisation**

Globalisation has many critics who regard it as aggressive capitalism and fear that it creates cultural absorption (Americanization, Japanization), homogenized universalising of culture, and thrives on exploitation (Harris, 1998, p453; Appadurai, 2003, p30; Appelbaum, 1997, p313). Even the concept of how universal rights could work is thrown into doubt, as it is accused of contradicting cultural diversity (Rebellato, 2009, p64 and 67). Conversely localization, seen as oppositional to globalisation, does not work in principle either; as Rebellato (2009) notes, “[...] localization is an inadequate response to globalization. In political terms it seems to entail our shutting ourselves off from our neighbours in the world. In philosophical terms, it lapses into contradiction.” (p58-59). Rebellato sees this contradiction as stemming from a false opposition, as he sees both the local and the global as inherent in globalisation. Of course the truth of the matter is that simple dichotomies do not hold up under scrutiny and, as educational theorists Edwards and Usher (2000) note, “[...]the global and the local cannot be separated” (p47).

## **Advocates of globalisation**

Advocates state that globalisation simply highlights the natural process of migration, which is as common in human history as is remaining settled in one place. Proponents see the development of cultural hybridity rather than homogenization (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p34; Benhabib, 2002, p151). Held (2002) disputes the idea that globalisation is destroying the nation state and notes that these nation states and local identities are proving to be surprisingly robust, especially as many of these are under two hundred years old (p49 and 51).

## **Conclusion**

This research is not concerned with either defending or attacking globalisation.

Globalisation is a lived reality and multiculturalism is the very real every day experience of

both a global economy and internationalist principles. Those living in multicultural societies need to find ways to respond to the shifting boundaries and identities discussed above. As Sen (2007) notes, “The globalized nature of the contemporary world does not allow the luxury of ignoring the difficult questions multiculturalism raises” (p149). The cultural ideologies of cosmopolitanism thus resonate with diversity and Benhabib (2002) offers some suggestions to help address these difficult questions:

“A global civilization that is to be shared by world citizens will need to be nourished by local attachments; rich cultural debate; contestations about the identity of the “we”; and a sense of democratic experimentation with institutional design and redesign” (p184).

How an organisation such as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre responds to and negotiates these challenges is a key component of this research.

The fundamental areas of multiculturalism, race, ethnicity, internationalism, globalisation and cosmopolitanism that I have explored above have, rightly so, become central to much post-modern discourse. Conversely the area of class analysis has largely fallen out of favour. However, through the process of this research it has emerged as significant, and therefore the following section will explore the concept of class.



# **Class**

## **Introduction**

Class analysis, which was once such a pivotal theoretical and political device, has in the last three decades largely fallen from grace (Cannadine, 1998, p1). It is now widely acknowledged that the popular concept of class favoured by the philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionary Karl Marx is overly simplistic, and that there are more factors to be considered in social, political and economic analysis than class alone (Cannadine, 1998, p11). However, when it comes to examining social equality, identity and participation (civic and cultural) class still has an important part to play (Bennett, 2009, p25). As this research is concerned with all of the aforementioned, it would be remiss to ignore it (Cannadine, 1998, p16).

Therefore, in this section I will explore some definitions of class, give a brief historical context of class analysis, present reasons why it has largely fallen out of favour and arguments in support of continuing to use class analysis. It is not possible to give a large amount of space in this research to exploring the vast subject of class analysis, and therefore this section will concentrate on the areas of central significance to this research. Thus I will examine how class impacts on social equality, including its role in social mobility, class bias and the relationship between culture and class. I will then briefly explore the relationship between class and race and the way that class intersects with other identity classifications. I am limiting the number of theorists I am drawing on in order to keep this section concise and focused, and have chosen those who are mainly concerned with class and social equality/mobility and the relationship between class and race.

## Definitions of class

Karl Marx, writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had an enormous impact on generations of social theorists (and of course a huge political impact in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). His class theory encompassed the idea of class *in itself*, defining class as a categorisation of people based on their occupation, income and wealth, and *for itself*, where the people within a class develop a consciousness and common objectives which they then pursue together (Cannadine, 1998, p3-4). Marx saw class as related to the means of production, and thus his class theory was largely dichotomous (divided into those that own and those that work for those that own). The use of the geographical term *stratification* served to demonstrate the fixity of class layers, and he argued that the movement of a minority of individuals between class layers (social mobility) might change life for individuals but would not destabilise the existence of the layers themselves (Saunders, 1990, p17 and p7).

One of the problems with talking about class is, like multiculturalism, pinning down what people actually mean when they use the term. For example, the historian David Cannadine uses the example of former Prime Minister John Major's call for a classless society. It is not clear what he means by this, as Cannadine (1998) asks, "[...] did he mean the abolition of hierarchy, or of the distinctions upper/middle/lower, or of the divide between 'us' and 'them'? Once again, the words cannot tell us" (p166). Social theorist Max Weber differed from Marx in his understanding of class in that Marx placed a greater emphasis on classes as real units with social signifiers, whereas Weber saw classes as economically similar groups (Saunders, 1990, p20). My research takes place in the context of Britain, and Cannadine (1998) notes that it is popularly conceived at home and abroad that the British are obsessed with class (p16). Perhaps this is because British society is inherently hierarchical - before any other social examination can be made we have to acknowledge that we have in place a monarchy and a peerage. Cannadine draws on historical sociologist W.G Runciman's declaration that an examination of 300 years of British history shows four

main class categories: the elite, managers/professionals, the workers and an underclass (1998, p18). However, most commonly class is divided into the three tiers of upper, middle and lower class, and is permeated with an attitude of 'them and us' (Cannadine, 1998, p19). By defining the working class as those who *work for others*, it is easy to find oneself in a situation where the working class becomes amorphous, ill-defined and encompassing much of the middle classes. However, the left wing commentator Owen Jones (2011) adds the caveat that the term working class applies to "[...] not only those who sell their labour, but those who lack autonomy, or control over this labour" (p144).

The French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, writing from the 1970's through to the early 2000's, wrote emphatically about the relationship between class and aesthetic taste (as manifest in culture). His belief that cultural dominance was in a constant interplay with economic and social power stated that the middle classes were, "[...] chief beneficiaries of, and as main agents in, the reproduction of social and cultural dominance" (Bennett, 2009, p177). I will discuss his work in more detail below.

### **Troubling class**

As I have mentioned above, class analysis has fallen out of fashion in the last three decades, and here I will briefly put this fall into context.

The first consideration is that class analysis, which was so pioneering in the 1950's and 1960's, was a *master narrative*, and postmodernism has debunked the concept of the master narrative as implausible and replaced it with a discourse which is more self-reflexive and fragmented (Cannadine, 1998, p12). Other ways of seeing the world, which have included feminism, post colonialism and identity politics, have largely replaced class as the lens through which to explore society (Cannadine, 1998, p11).

The second consideration are the roles that Thatcherism in the 1980's, and New Labour that followed, have had in discrediting the concept of class (Bennett, 2009, p2). Cannadine

(1998) believes that the general consensus that, rather than a realistic social description, class talk is in fact seditious and bombastic, is Thatcherite in its origins (p2). Margaret Thatcher, the conservative Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, was keen to dismiss the lexicon of class - “‘Class,’ she insisted, ‘is a communist concept. It groups people as bundles, and sets them against one another’” (Cannadine, 1998, p2). As mentioned above, her successor, John Major, sought to bring about a *classless society*. It is perhaps not surprising that a conservative government would want to distance itself from class discourse as much of it is rooted in socialist philosophy. The fact that Labour, traditionally the party of the working classes, followed this trend, replacing class with *social exclusion*, was more surprising (Cannadine, 1998, p1; Bennett, 2009, p2). However, when Labour became New Labour it sought to court the middle class vote and thus needed to distance itself from class politics, which pitted the working classes against the upper and middle classes. If New Labour’s philosophy was based on the idea of inclusivity and community it did not fit comfortably with class struggle, and thus focused instead on social mobility and exclusion, which I will discuss in more detail below (Cannadine, 1998, p13; Jones, 2011, p88).

Now we have a coalition government with a Conservative Prime Minister, who describes himself as middle class<sup>19</sup> but was educated at Eton, is a millionaire and 5<sup>th</sup> cousin of Queen Elizabeth II. Cameron’s first cabinet contained 23 millionaires out of 29 ministers, with a 59 per cent rate of public school attendance and only three comprehensive school attendees (Jones, 2011, p76-77). Government policies around education align strongly with the upper middle class idea of schooling discussed by Bourdieu. David Cameron has accused the labour leader Ed Milliband of waging a class war<sup>20</sup>, whilst in turn Milliband is actually trying

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<sup>19</sup> <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tobyyoung/100050358/if-david-cameron-is-middle-class-what-does-that-make-the-rest-of-us/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19890459>

to appeal to the middle classes with the term ‘the squeezed middle’ - notably, although harnessing class based feelings, the word class is itself absent<sup>21</sup>.

The third consideration is that class as a discursive theory was dealt a heavy blow when, from 1989-1991, Eastern European communism collapsed. As Cannadine sums up:

“Communism is dead, therefore Marxism is dead, therefore class is dead: thus runs the argument” (Cannadine, 1998, p14). In the next section I will explore the rationale that, despite the reasons above supposedly accounting for its demise, in academic and political discourse class is still a useful concept.

### **Arguments in support of the use of the term class**

Cannadine (1998) is adamant that despite the disappearance of class rhetoric, class itself has not suffered the fall it is claimed to have, and is still imminently relevant and real (p1). However he offers the caveat that in order to utilise class theory it must be “[...] appropriately defined, properly understood, imaginatively treated and openly approached”(Cannadine, 1998, p2). Although he states that Marx’s definition of class may need reworking and that class may not be as essential in sociological understanding as it was once thought to be, he argues that it is *not* a false account of history, as claimed by Thatcher, and that people’s circumstances *do* affect their identities and life chances. He emphatically challenges people to tell the residents of high-rise ghettos, council estates or of affluent areas that their social identities are merely metaphorical creations, and surmises that they will not concur (Cannadine, 1998, p17).

Cannadine is not alone in this view. Owen Jones (2011) also refutes the idea that class is not relevant, and argues that our society has in fact become more unequal and class divided, and that it is the *myth* of classlessness that has perpetuated this (p167). The sociologist Tony Bennet (2009), reviewing Bourdieu’s seminal work, *Class, Culture,*

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11848303>

*Distinction*, states that those he terms the *executive class* have found a way to reap the benefits that their class provides but at the same time repudiate the idea of distinctive classes; thus they minimise the opportunities for their position to be challenged from those outside of it, and maintain their privileged status (p178).

### **How class impacts on equality**

The importance that class analysis holds is in its role in examining how equal a society is. Access to resources, life chances, health outcomes and participation in public life are all measures of equality. In researching how the Birmingham Repertory Theatre engages with people, the interplay of cultural participation and class discussed below is thus paramount. Without targeted work by The REP, children who are not born with cultural capital will be very unlikely to access the theatre, and thus their chances of accessing a wide variety of other beneficial areas will also be severely limited.

The political philosopher, Brian Barry (2005), states that:

“On the basis of just a few facts about a child, such as its social class and its race or ethnicity, we can make a good prediction of where it will finish up in the distribution of earnings, the likelihood it will spend time in jail, and many other outcomes, good and bad” (p41).

Of course he notes that some people will depart from this prediction, and I will now discuss this in more detail with regards to social mobility.

### ***Social mobility***

Social mobility most commonly refers to how easy it is for someone of any given background to ‘improve their lot’. Specifically it often refers to the accessibility of jobs, positions of power and influence to those who have not been brought up by people in these positions. The social researcher Peter Saunders stated in 1990 that instances of

children entering the workplace in positions of higher status and income potential than their parents/carers were much more common, due to improvements in educational provision in the last half century (p69). However, nearly 25 years after Saunders was writing, social mobility is not readily achievable. If we return to the work of Bourdieu, writing in France in the 1970's, we can see that he debunked the myth that education provides social mobility, and rather maintains inequality by naturalising what are in fact social provisions (Bourdieu, 1974, p32). This is also the case in Britain today. In assessing social mobility, looking at the educational background of people who are in positions of privilege and power is a key way of determining how mobile a society is. Jones (2011) draws on statistics from the Sutton Trust to highlight that, whereas only seven out of every hundred Britons are educated at a private school, more than 50% of the top hundred journalists, almost half of the top civil servants, almost 70 per cent of finance directors and top barristers and over half of the students at Oxbridge were (p27, 29,171-172). It is also notable that MP's are over four times as likely to have had fee paying education than the rest of the population (Jones, 2011, p27, 29,171-172). In economic terms, in 2008, the top bosses in Britain were earning 94 times the national average, an increase from 47 times just eight years earlier (Jones, 2011, p63). Therefore if some people are socially mobile, the vast majority are not. This discrepancy leads to what Cannadine (1998) coins a vision of 'social apartheid'(p187).

### ***Culture and equality***

Bourdieu claimed that a lack of social mobility was due to the perpetuation of class boundaries, which in turn was largely due to *cultural capital*, which he describes as "forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions" (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7). He states that although cultural tastes are not the initial reason behind social and economic inequalities, they function as social signifiers that justify and uphold social differences (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p2). These cultural traits and tropes are passed on from

parents/carers to children (if the parents/carers are equipped with the cultural capital themselves), who are then able to use this cultural capital to acquire their own positions of power (Bennett, 2009, p13). This works because, as Bourdieu noted, school systems are set up to reward the cultural knowledge and accumulation of a certain (middle) class of children and thus, by treating all children as if they should have this cultural capital, those without it are at an immediate disadvantage. Bourdieu (1974) advocated that a school needs to provide “[...]all with the means of *acquiring* that which, although apparently a natural gift, is only *given* to the children of the educated classes [...]” (p37-38). Thus cultural consumption has a significant two-way relationship with social mobility.

### ***Participation***

Economic income plays a large part in participation in activities, seen as a crucial aspect of participation in community life (Morrow, 2011, p66; Leverett, 2011, p16). Research shows that, alongside specific cultural tastes, it is participation itself in any form of activity that is most markedly different between classes. Significantly, working class people are largely absent from participating in commercial and state public culture and the public sphere in general (Bennett, 2009, p201 -202).

### ***Class bias***

It is important to note that social mobility is not regarded by all as the answer to inequality. Jones (2011) sees the term as providing an excuse for inertia from the powerful classes: “Social mobility can mean offering an escape route from poverty rather than attempting to abolish poverty” (p97). He puts forward a strong case that the working classes have in recent times been demonized to justify the lack of action by governments in tackling inequality. He argues that legitimizing the culture of the working classes and improving their economic, social and housing conditions would be the best way to solve social inequality.



## **Class and race**

Bourdieu's assertions are not without their critics. His writing takes place within a concept of the nation state, and does not adequately tackle the role of religion, gender, ethnicity and globalisation (Bennett, 2009, p27). It is important to bear in mind the effect that these other influences have on cultural capital but it does not mitigate the role of class entirely, and often ethnicity and class can have a complicated interaction. For example, if class and cultural capital are strongly entwined, then familiarity with 'national cultural capital' allows those who are accustomed to it to have a stronger sense of belonging than those who are not, and a sense of belonging is strongly associated with social and political participation (Bennett, 2009, p250). Around 10 per cent of the working class is non-white (more than twice the proportion than for the middle class), and the social disadvantages that are often felt by minoritised cultures serve to perpetuate their prevalence in jobs with low status and low income (Jones, 2011, p243; Bennett, 2009, p199).

There are also complicated tensions around ethnicity and class, especially when referring to the working class. The working class is, despite the figures discussed above, often conceived of as white. By ignoring the multi-racial make up of this social group, and because class has fallen out of the political lexicon - largely replaced by ethnicity - racist parties such as the BNP have capitalised on the feeling from some of the white working class that they are one group in competition with other ethnic groups for resources (Jones, 2011, p102 and p8). Prejudices against the working class have also been justified by the presentation of them as racist, despite figures to show that as a class it is more ethnically mixed than any other (Jones, 2011, p243).

## **How I am using the term class**

As noted above, although class is still an important factor in determining social equality and access to jobs and resources, and Bourdieu's work around cultural capital still has a useful

function, it is important to take a more pluralistic approach to social analysis which takes into account the multiple factors that play a part in identity formation (as discussed in the section on ethnicity above) (Bennett, 2009, p25). There are complex interactions between ethnicity and class, as briefly discussed above, and social mobility can be greatly affected by both the class and ethnic group you are born into, with one sometimes compensating for or compounding the effects of the other (Modood, 2007, p59). Therefore I will be using the analysis of class as a useful tool in exploring access to public and cultural spaces and factors that come to bear on equality and participation. However, as with race and ethnicity, I will not reify class terms and will rather open up and problematise them where appropriate, using them as part of a more complex and nuanced approach to identity classification and interplay (Cannadine, 1998, p2).

Some of the youth theatre groups which this research explores are based in specific neighbourhoods, chosen in part due to the potential barriers of class and/or ethnicity to young people accessing the theatre. Also, the concepts discussed above of communities being based around ethnicity and/or class, and the existence of diasporic communities due to globalisation, all mean that the concept of community is integral to this research. Thus, I will explore this complicated term in the next section.

# Community

## Introduction

The much contested term community is an emotive one, evoking vivid images which are as diverse as they are powerful. The word can conjure up feelings of nostalgia and safety, as the sociologist Bauman (2001) asserts: “[...]community is a ‘warm’ place, a cosy and comfortable place” (p1). However, it is not always used in a comforting way, and can be employed to patronize by signifying the disadvantaged or being bestowed upon those who are deemed ‘other’ (Delanty, 2010, pxii, xiii; Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p7; Bauman, 2001, p89). Community often refers to interactions of people in one geographic place, but it can also be used in association with collective action, interest groups, digital associations and transnational affiliations such as diasporas (Delanty, 2010, pxii, xiii). To belong to a community can be deemed empowering or limiting and, paradoxically, the sense of belonging that it offers to some is usually at the expense of the exclusion of others.

Although the term may be contested, it is still useful - as the sociologist Delanty (2010) points out, all sociological terms are contested and to remove one is merely to replace it with another (pxi). Therefore I will use the term community, but first I will briefly explore definitions, historical context, local and global communities, belonging and community, contesting community, the use of the term in relation to minoritised ethnic groups, and the role of dialogue and the public sphere in creating community.

## Definition

*“Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class or politics; they may be large or small; ‘thin’ or ‘thick’ attachments may underlie them; they may be locally based or globally organized; they may be affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order;*

*they may be traditional, modern or even postmodern; they may be reactionary or progressive”(Delanty, 2010, p11)*

As Delanty’s definition above shows, the term can be used in a profusion of settings, but crucially it is often seen as providing a system of support and a feeling of belonging, both of which are tied up in a social identity which is in turn rooted in how one group regards itself in relation to others (Wellman, 2001, p27 quoted in Castells, 2001, p127 in Delanty, 2010). The concept of community has also changed over time, which I will now briefly explore.

### **History of community**

Historically, community was a major part of the ancient Greek political system where public engagement was key, and up until the Enlightenment it was regarded as the substance of society (Delanty, 2010, p1 and p3). Then in the nineteenth century, when the state was viewed with suspicion, community was deemed to be a Utopian ideal. With the crisis of modernity in the twentieth century came an interest in how community could tackle a perceived social malady (Delanty, 2010, p 1,3 and 19). During the 1980’s, in keeping with theoretical shifts towards individualism, the term community began to move away from locality based interaction towards a social construction based on identity (Delanty, 2010, p11). Although a more fluid interpretation of community is valuable in the context of this research, it is also useful to retain the idea of community as attached to a sense of place, and I will return to this in the following section on space and place (Delanty, 2010, pxii).

International and government theorist Benedict Anderson’s seminal 1983 work *Imagined Communities* focused on the concept of the nation state, but it has proved to be an evocative term and is now used to describe other types of community, including communities of interest (e.g. taste in music or popular culture, or those who have similar rights to defend based, for example, on sexuality) and virtual communities (e.g. online networks). Anderson states that *all* communities are imagined, and it is the *way* in which

they are imagined and produced that is important in understanding them (Anderson & American Council of Learned Societies., 2006, p6). Delanty expands on this and draws on Wagner to note that communities are *both* real *and* imagined, and imagining themselves is a key part of any community (Wagner in Delanty, 2010, pxii). Benhabib (2002) deliberately twists the term *Imagined Communities* to discredit notions of homogenous community in an age of mass migration as fictitious and thus ‘truly imagined’ (p33).

### **Local and global communities**

As I discussed in the previous section on Internationalism and globalisation, the local and the global are often pitted against one another, and there is no exception in the context of community, as Delanty (2010) observes:

“This conflict [local and universal] has never been resolved and has evolved to the present day when we find two kinds of community in conflict: the cosmopolitan quest for belonging on a global level and the indigenous search for roots” (p7).

However, as I have explored, there is also much overlap between the two. Technological advancements have created communities which function across time and space, and diasporas create both communities within communities and communities which span across the globe (Delanty, 2010, p158).

### **Belonging to a community**

The appeal of community is often seen to be rooted in a desire to belong, not in an abstract sense, but rooted to something or somewhere in particular (Sennett in Delanty, 2010, px; Bauman, 2001, p111). As hooks (2009) declares in *Belonging*, “We are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic” (p5). Many of these memories are rooted to place, and I will explore place and space in more detail in the next section. First, it is important to explore what belonging to a community can mean.

The post-modern age is often regarded as insecure, as so much is contested and in flux. This offers great opportunities but can also lead to a feeling of instability, and thus the search for a sense of belonging becomes more urgent (Delanty, 2010, p101). Community can come to mean the 'defence of place', but of course this leads to the idea that the community needs to keep out others (Bauman, 2001, p112). Inclusion and exclusion swing from the same axis and as Delanty (2010) succinctly observes, "It appears that the price for the inclusion of some is the exclusion of others" (p6).

### **Contesting community**

Community is sometimes accused of being restrictive and reifying of culture, and it is reproached for confining people to a singular way of being (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p1; Delanty, 2010, p70; Bauman, 2001, p76). It is important that this possibility is taken seriously, as I discussed in regard to multiculturalism. However, it is also important to note that communities often comfortably (and sometimes uncomfortably, which I will discuss below) accommodate significant diversity, and people interpreting the same symbols and rituals differently (Cohen cited in Delanty, 2010, p33). However, as Wetherell *et al* (2007) note in regard to community cohesion, group identity is complex and problematic, and Bauman (2001) highlights that laudable as rights gained by collective groups are, they often involve what he regards as false erection of boundaries around people to gain them (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p1; Bauman, 2001, p76). It is possible to balance individual and group rights but in order to do so it is thus important to always be aware of maintaining fluidity of boundaries (as I discussed in the section on multiculturalism).

### **Ethnic communities**

The term community is often used when referring to people from minoritised ethnicity backgrounds, for example 'the Muslim community', 'the Asian community', 'the Polish community'. Bauman is critical of this, as he states that an assignment to a specific 'ethnic

minority' community is bestowed upon people without their blessing, and this demarcation can act as an enforced confinement (Bauman, 2001, p89 - 90). This type of imposition of community identity is what I seek to avoid by troubling accepted race and ethnicity classifications and offering the opportunity for participants to give their own identity descriptors, as discussed in the methodology section.

It is also crucial to note that when communities are designated their identity from the outside, uniformity is often wrongly assumed. Dilwar Hussain, of the Commission for Racial Equality, highlights this in regard to Islam, as there are a diverse number of Muslim communities in Britain and yet Muslims are treated homogenously. He states that too often it is regarded that "[...] 'they' are the community which needs to be 'cohered' into white British communities" (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p7). As well as misassumptions of internal consistency, the idea of communities that are segregated from others on the lines of ethnicity is too often a misrepresentation of the truth (as I discussed when I explored multiculturalism), and where there is any segregation it often ignores the fundamental component of racism.

### **Self- enclosure and ghettos**

As discussed above, uncritical homogenization of communities is to be avoided, and an imposition of an identity onto a person or a group of people is deeply problematic. However, it is also important to recognise that sometimes group needs exist, and there are situations where people choose to regard themselves as a community and/or to work together for collective rights or action. Some communities, however, are built out of anxiety, and as is noted above people can self-enclose (often through fear of the other) and have enclosure forced upon them (through others fearing them). Ethnicity can be a powerful component in enclosure. Bauman (2001) asserts that nation states often desire assimilation, and yet never fully grant it to those who have the so-called 'wrong origins'.

Therefore, “the decision of the dominant to enclose the dominated in the shell of an ‘ethnic minority’ on the grounds of its reluctance or unfitness to break the shell has all the marks of a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p96). The theorist bell hooks is uncompromising in her assertion that fear of racist abuse keeps black people living in separation for a feeling of safety (hooks, 2009, p70 ).

People of affluent backgrounds can self-enclose through gated communities, using their capital to move to expensive areas or by gentrifying poorer areas, where people who are socially disadvantaged often have enclosure thrust upon them (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p6). As Bauman (2001) summarises, voluntary ghettos function to keep undesirable people *out*, the inhabitants can leave at will, whereas involuntary ghettos keep the inhabitants *in* through lack of capital to move out, racism from inhabitants of white neighbourhoods and police harassment of those who do try and leave (p116-117). Within these enforced ghettos, community - in the safe, warm, empowering sense that it is often regarded - does not flourish as is sometimes claimed. As Bauman (2001) notes, “Ghetto life does not sediment community. Sharing stigma and public humiliation does not make the sufferers into brothers, it feeds mutual derision, contempt and hatred” (p121).

However, Bauman (2001) acknowledges the immense capacity for those in both voluntary and involuntary ghettos to, once inside, facilitate the maintenance of the barriers (p117). hooks (2009), although recognising the very real experience of racism and desire for safety, rallies against the continuation of this segregation if we ever want to live in “beloved community” (p70 and p85).

### **Community through dialogue and the public sphere**

The sociologist Jurgen Habermas stated that community is “[...] never complete but is always in the process of being made” (Habermas in Delanty, 2010, p89). It is this sense of community as always in progress that appeals to advocates of deliberative democracy and



those that believe that genuine community thrives on dialogue (or multilogue) and participation (Delanty, 2010, p53; Modood, 2007, p127; Gutmann in Gutmann & Taylor, 1994, p7). Crucially, what community cohesion projects have often been accused of overlooking or misinterpreting is that successful communities do not require wholesale agreement. Rather the opposite - conflict and disagreement are crucial to successful community, and it is how this is handled and negotiated that is key (Appiah, 2007, p44; Benhabib, 2002, p8; Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p8). Crucially, these conversations must happen with an atmosphere of respect, a feeling of safety and without domination by some participants (Benhabib, 2002, p11; Bauman, 2001, p142). They also need to occur in the public sphere to be truly beneficial (Benhabib, 2002, p106; Sen, 2007, p55). However, the arenas for such participation are now few and far between, although perhaps contemporary technologies are offering a new type of space for this to occur.

## **Conclusion**

This research explores the relationship that the Young REP participants have to their local community (geographical), their school community (institutional) and the community that is the Young REP – both within their own group and to the Young REP in a wider sense (interest group and opportunity for participation). What it means to belong to a community, perceptions (both negative and positive) of local community and diasporic communities are all pertinent issues within this research. Creating and managing a community through participation and multilogue in safe spaces is highly relevant in the context of the Young REP, both within individual groups and between them, and the way in which they imagine this community (and the others I have mentioned) are also key components of this research, which I explore in the analysis section. Of course, community is strongly linked to space, place and liminality, and I will explore these key terms in the next section.

## Space and place

### Introduction

The concepts space and place have become increasingly significant to post-modern theorists who, lamenting the way that modernists overlooked their significance, regard them as a key component of understanding a wide variety of social situations and issues (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p31; Horton *et al.*, 2011, p40). The magnitude of these terms is summed up by human geographer Tim Cresswell (2004), who states succinctly that “it is impossible, after all, to think of a world without place” (p50). It is inconceivable to explore how young people relate to their communities and to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, or to consider concepts such as globalisation and diaspora without investigating theories of space and place. Therefore, in this section I will firstly outline some definitions of space and place, examining the differences and overlaps between the two terms. Then I will consider space as a social construct, the role of power and access to space, space and belonging, space and globalisation and liminal space.

### Definitions

Space and place are often conceived in overlapping yet distinct ways. Space is frequently regarded as the abstract half of the space/place relationship – space being a material fact of existence which is devoid of any assigned significance (Cresswell, 2004, p8; Tuan, 1977, p198). Place on the other hand is often seen as an evolution of space - that space *becomes* place through familiarity, memory, naming and ascribed meaning (Tuan, 1977, p6, 73 and 136; Cresswell, 2004, p10; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003, p13; Carter *et al.*, 1993, pxii).

The terms can also be seen to represent competing human needs, in the sense that space represents freedom and place represents security (Tuan, 1977, p1). However, this distinction is not always upheld, and Cresswell draws on Edward Ralph to explain that the

flow of meaning between space and place is more fluid than might be suggested by other definitions (Ralph 1976,8 in Cresswell, 2004). Fellow geographer Doreen Massey (2005) rallies against these distinctions and states that “My argument is not that place is not concrete, grounded, lived etc. etc. it is that space is too” (p185). Massey urges us to rethink our concept of space as mere surface and to regard it instead as a “[...] meeting-up of histories” (p4). Crucially what is being noted is that space and place are important because they are inherently social, power laden and tied up with our concepts of self, belonging and relationship to others. I will now explore these facets of space and place, beginning with space as socially constructed.

### **Space as socially constructed**

Space holds significance mainly because of what occurs within it, as the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre(1991) asserts, “It seems to be well established that physical space has no ‘reality’ without the energy that is deployed within it” (p13). Applied drama theorist and practitioner Helen Nicholson draws on Lefebvre’s theories to note that the meanings held by space are in constant flux and negotiation, and these negotiations and interactions with and within space mark space not as a *static* vessel, but rather as *movement* its self (Nicholson, 2011, p11; Pandya 1990 in Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003, p5). The post-modern shift in thinking around space acknowledges its symbiotic relationship with people and thus opens up the possibility of spaces/places simultaneously holding multiple meanings for multiple individuals or communities (Wiles, 2003, p263).

The social component of space marks it as open and fluid and never finished, and this understanding of space helps challenge modernist notions of a boundaried space with pre-ascribed meanings. These prior assumptions about space allowed for power to go unnoticed and only certain narratives about the world to be told, two points I will return to below (Cresswell, 2004, p39). By accepting the openness and un-finishedness of place and

space, (re)reading of the past and possibilities for the present and the future are opened up (Cresswell, 2004, p37; Massey, 2005, p12 and 131).

Interaction is a key component of all spaces, but it is within public spaces that it becomes even more interesting. Massey (2005) asserts that the dynamic and exciting aspect of place is, as she puts it, the 'throwntogetherness' (both human and non-human) of it and the negotiation that then ensues (p140). However, there is, as has been mentioned in the previous section on community, a decline in democratic public spaces, and there has always been a tension around the power dynamics within these spaces and access to them, which I will now explore (Massey, 2005, p152; Hudson *et al.*, 2009, p214; Carter *et al.*, 1993, pxiv).

### **Space and Power**

Power is a significant component of space and place, as Cresswell (2004) notes: "place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power" (p12). As I explored above, as space and place are socially constructed, all of the issues of equality, fairness and power that are at work in any social situation, (and the interaction and effect of factors such as ethnicity and class as discussed in previous sections) are present in the construction of space and place. Therefore, assumptions that spaces are neutral or democratically ascribed with meaning hides the true power/s at work (Bauman, 2001, p116-117; Tuan, 1977, p170; Massey, 2005, p67).

As I considered in the section on community, the poor do not choose their environments, but those with money do. This is true both in regard to place of residence and, as I explored earlier, freedom of movement from beyond a neighbourhood. This has profound implications in regard to gaining access to different spaces. Lefebvre notes that space is used for control and McAuley (1999) draws on this to highlight that "[...] one of the major forms of control is determining who shall have access to what space" (p71). As I explored

in the section on class, access to a variety of spaces, but especially to culture, is a key component of social mobility and equality. Therefore unpicking assumptions about entry to certain spaces is a key part of democratising them, and is highly relevant to a building like the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (Nicholson, 2011, p89-90). The director Peter Brook's seminal work *The Empty Space*, first published in 1968, begins with the line "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage" (Brook, 1990, p11). However, the idea of a truly empty space - devoid of meaning, ready to be entered into - has widely been debunked, as director and theatre scholar Ric Knowles (2010) notes, "[...] ideology abhors a vacuum and there is no such thing as an empty space" (p20-21). The way that people feel about and respond to a building such as The REP is highly complex and significant, and these will be crucial considerations that I will explore in the analysis section (Wiles, 2003, p10; McAuley, 1999, p41).

### **Space and belonging**

Leverett (2011) notes that, "Spaces invoke powerful feelings, including those associated with belonging, exclusion, safety and/or danger" (p9). As I examined in respect of community, the feeling and drive for belonging is complex and paradoxically the inclusion of some results in the exclusion of others (Cresswell, 2004, p27). This sense of belonging is intricately tied up with space and place, as the sociologist Richard Sennett notes, "[...] the sense of place is based on the need to belong not to "society" in the abstract but to somewhere in particular, in satisfying that need, people develop commitment and loyalty" (Sennett cited in Bauman, 2001, p111). The feeling of belonging which is rooted in place takes time and familiarity to grow and develop (Tuan, 1977, p183). As geographer Edward Relph notes, the level of attachment and depth of the feeling of belonging are dependent on proximity and familiarity (Relph 1976,49 cited in Cresswell, 2004, p44). These are key considerations which I will explore in regard to the relationship that the youth theatre groups each have with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre building.

## **Space and Globalisation**

Space and place have become increasingly relevant to theorists in a number of areas, in no small part due to globalisation. As Bauman notes, “a bizarre adventure happened to space on the road to globalization: it lost its importance while gaining its significance” (Bauman, 2001, p110). As I explored in the section on internationalism and globalisation, the opening up of the world economically and culturally has profoundly affected (both practically and metaphorically) how we regard the local and the global, and both of these are strongly related to space and place.

As I have explored throughout this literature review post modernism, post colonialism and diaspora trouble previous conceptions of identity, culture, community, national/international, and the same is true of concepts of space and place (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p40). Globalisation has given rise to complicated re-negotiations of the meaning of these terms and the opportunity for multiple and hybrid narratives to emerge, which destabilise the narratives of modernity (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p10; Massey, 2005, p64).

## **Liminal space**

Liminal space is an important concept in this research, as it is intertwined throughout many of the key themes that I am exploring (community, ethnicity, internationalism, globalisation, multiculturalism) and also has a particular significance to theatre and drama. Anthropologist Victor Turner developed the phrase drawing on the work of ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep to refer to the state of ‘betwixt and between’, or as Delanty paraphrases, ‘moments in and out of time’ (Turner, 1982; Delanty, 2010, p31). Originally referring to rituals and then applied to performance, the concept of inhabiting the space between two states of being and the opportunities that this affords offers itself to a variety of pertinent situations.

Although the term liminal is not always used, the phrase 'in-between space' refers to very similar concepts, and 'diaspora space' stands for many of the same ideas. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha uses 'in-between spaces' to refer to the potential that is opened up when people of different cultural backgrounds meet up, and Braziel and Mannur regard diasporic space as liminal, with the potential for complex identity negotiation (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p5; Bhabha, 1994, p2).

This research set out in part to explore the hypothesis that there are 'in-between zones' generated by internationalism and multiculturalism, which may provide ethical as well as aesthetic space for promoting community based theatre projects with young people of varied ethnicities. The possibility for liminal space within this research include the theatre itself, the rooms that the young people rehearse in, and the metaphorical spaces opened up by globalisation and diaspora. It is also significant that young people are themselves often seen as liminal (not children and not yet adults) and as inhabiting a constant liminal space (Wulff & Amit, 1995).

## **Conclusion**

I will be drawing on the concepts of space and place when considering the relationship that the participants of the research have with and within their communities, to the theatre building, to the rehearsal room, to the city and to the world. Throughout my analysis section I will explore the role of space and place in relation to the above mentioned (community, globalisation, diaspora, ethnicity and multiculturalism) as well as in regard to cities, young people, theatre and youth theatre. In the next section I will outline the role and value of youth theatre and the importance of undertaking research within this field.

## **Youth Theatre**

*“Youth theatre has long been perceived to have important personal and social impacts on young people.” (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p58)*

*“The artist has always been an educator, a storyteller and a deliverer of knowledge transfer – these are processes that take place between actor and audience every night, in every theatre, during every performance. Evidence suggests that when theatre-makers, educators and young people come together in a creative collaboration it is at this point that life-changing effects take place.” (Blackman, 2010, p196)*

## **Introduction**

This research does not purport to offer evidence of the personal and social impacts of youth theatre. Nor does it offer evidence of the transformative powers of drama and theatre education. However, it does situate itself within the context of a wealth of research that does just that. Rather than attempting to replicate this plethora of past research, this project begins from the position that drama and theatre education can be positive forces in the lives of young people. I will outline below why participation in and access to the arts is important, some of the main claims made by Drama and Theatre Education (D&TE), the specific role of youth theatre, barriers to accessing youth theatre, barriers to accessing youth theatre buildings and the opportunities afforded both to young people and the theatres themselves when theatres are made more accessible. These are all themes which are central to my exploration of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre’s relationship with its youth theatre groups.



## **The value of the Arts**

There has long been debate over the true role of the arts in society –whether it is aesthetic, social or economic, and Matarasso (1997) attempts to settle this debate with his conciliatory statement: “usefulness can be beautiful, and beauty useful. Neither use nor ornament, but both” (p87). Martha Nussbaum, in her 2010 book *Not for Profit*, mounts an impressive case for the important role that the arts and humanities play in making the world a better place to live. Much of their power, she argues, is due to their ability to foster empathy, which she goes on to state is an essential component in creating a more successful future for the world. Nussbaum explains that through this fostering of empathy, the arts and humanities:

[...]make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favour of sympathetic and reasoned debate” (2010, p143).

Prominent D&TE practitioner/theorists see the arts as a force for common good, and essential for enhanced and fulfilling lives that coincide with Nussbaum’s views. For example Michael Anderson (2009) makes the bold statement, “everything in this book assumes that the arts should not only be the centre of education but also the centre of a deep and fulfilling existence” (Anderson *et al.*, , p1). The import of the arts to rewarding lives is also recognised by Joe Winston (2006):

“[...] in connecting the idea of goodness with that of the good life, beauty can provide us with a conceptual and analytical base from which to re-engage with an idea of the arts and of education as pursuits morally worthwhile for their own sake, for the life-enhancing qualities they can bring rather than the economic or social purposes they can serve.” (p299)

Participation in the arts can thus be seen as a central component to the good life, and it is also seen by many as a key component of social capital.

### **Cultural capital**

As I discussed in the section on class, access to theatre is still regarded as an important part of social and cultural capital, and an indicator of participation in broader civic life (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7; Bennett, 2009, p259; Nicholson, 2011, p82). The potential for theatre to be an enriching experience throughout our lives is only realised if people feel they are permitted to enter theatre spaces. Thus, equipping young people with the sense of eligibility to enter a theatre building is part of their cultural entitlement (Neelands, 2011, p3). Nicholson draws on William Morris' famous quote which captures this sense of entitlement beautifully and succinctly: "I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few" (Morris, 1973, p.54 in Nicholson, 2011, p26). For a truly fulfilling life it is thus important to both be able to access works of art and participate in the creation of your own (Anderson *et al.*, 2009, p53).

### **The value of Drama and Theatre Education (D&TE)**

*"Drama engages both the head and the heart. Learning through drama relies on the active involvement of our mind, body, feelings and spirit. In the realm of imagined experience, we take on roles of other characters and experience different situations so that our understandings of ourselves, of others and of the world we live grows" (Clifford & Herrmann, 1999, p16)*

Carey *et al.* (1994) define drama and theatre as "[...] a creative group activity in which individuals behave in 'as if' situations as either themselves or other people"(piii). Forms of drama and theatre are found in all cultures and exist in order to facilitate the consideration of the human condition (Carey *et al.*, 1994, piii). The differentiation between drama and theatre is by no means clear cut, and all variations involve elements of process and

performance. However, a simplistic definition within drama and theatre education is that theatre primarily has the audience as its focus, whereas “drama is more concerned with providing the child with lived-through experience, with the enactive moment, rather than with performing the rehearsed moment” (The-DICE-Consortium, 2010, p18-19).

Before discussing the value of drama and theatre education (D&TE), I will provide a brief outline of this hybrid term. However, this description of D&TE is necessarily brief, as there is not the scope within this thesis to offer a more rigorous exploration of the terms fluid meaning within the wide range of contexts and breadth of approaches. The term D&TE encompasses a diverse range of approaches, forms and components (of processes and performance) within a wide array of circumstances (The-DICE-Consortium, 2010, p18). The multiplicity of these forms is united by the fact that they situate themselves within an educational framework (in and outside of formal education) and the interest in the needs of the people participating. The reach of D&TE stretches beyond childhood and adolescence, as Neelands highlights: “drama and theatre education (D&TE) is an area of cultural learning that young people will encounter over a lifetime rather than within a lesson, in and beyond school and with life wide impacts” (Neelands, 2011, p3). The importance of the art form D&TE is based on evidence that it empowers participants, develops social skills including empathy, enhances self-esteem, encourages civic participation and enables social mobility (Clifford & Herrmann, 1999, p16; Anderson *et al.*, 2009, p150-151; The-DICE-Consortium, 2010). The two year, pan European research undertaken by the DICE Consortium (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education) gathered extensive data to measure the impact of drama and theatre education, and they discovered that young people who participated in drama were, amongst other things, more likely to communicate more confidently, be assessed more highly at school, cope with stress more effectively, participate in public issues and have more empathy (The-DICE-Consortium, 2010). It also found that having D&TE in the

curriculum will result in a rise in employment rates, higher school retention, citizens who are more active and more likely to be sympathetic to cultural diversity (The-DICE-Consortium, 2010).

### **The value of youth theatre**

Youth theatre, defined by Hughes and Wilson as a voluntary activity, outside of formal education and encompassing a wealth of theatre related activities with young people, can assist young people in making the transition from childhood to adulthood (Burton, 2002, p69; Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p57 and 58). The position that youth occupy can be perceived as liminal (as discussed in the section on space), as it is betwixt and between the states of childhood and adulthood. This liminality is often either seen as a reason to dismiss youth and not take them seriously or as a reason to fear them as uncontrolled and unpredictable (Wulff, 1995, p1; Buckingham, 2000, p3-4; Valentine *et al.*, 1998, p5). However, as a liminal site itself (between formal education and home) youth theatre seizes upon this liminality as providing an opportunity for social and creative exploration (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p69; Thompson, 2003, p68).

The National Association of Youth Theatre's (NAYT's) believe in the importance of youth theatre for young people, as expressed in their vision "to ensure every young person has the opportunity as a right to take part in safe, empowering, challenging theatre of excellence"<sup>22</sup>. They ask all youth theatre groups to agree to a set of principles upon joining which include the statements that:

*Youth theatre is vital to the personal, social, political, aesthetic and educational development of young people.*

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<sup>22</sup> [http://www.nayt.org.uk/about\\_us](http://www.nayt.org.uk/about_us)

*The theatre art is a universal expression of human kind and helps young people to find their place and voice in society.*<sup>23</sup>

As Jonothan Neelands notes in his document produced for the NAYT, *Excellent Youth Theatre: a self assessment tool for youth theatres*, NAYT's vision has implications for the ways that youth theatres engage with young people:

“These core values of ‘access’ and ‘entitlement’ carry with them the responsibility for registered youth theatres to do all they can to attract and include young people, rather than expect under-represented groups to come to them. This puts an onus on youth theatres to have active strategies for widening participation by young people” (Neelands, 2010, p8).

The principles outlined by NAYT are also embedded in international policies for children. Juliet Raynsford (2010), in *Inclusive Youth theatre*, the sister document to *Excellent Youth Theatre*, draws on Articles 30 and 31 of the United Nations’ *Convention on the Rights of the Child* to demonstrate the two most essential considerations for youth theatres:

- That youth theatres are able to support young people in expressing their individual cultural identities.
- That youth theatres ensure their participative theatre programmes are accessible to all young people regardless of individual ethnicity and cultural identity (p38)

Raynsford goes on to explain that although most of the youth theatre’s they surveyed had an aim of being welcoming and inclusive to all young people, the reality was that these groups, “[...] were not representative of the social and cultural demographics of the towns and cities in which they were based” (p8). This highlights key practical and theoretical issue for the ways that youth theatre organisations engage with young people, and there are

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<sup>23</sup> [www.nayt.org.uk](http://www.nayt.org.uk)

some additional key factors to consider in those cases where youth theatres are attached to theatre buildings.

## **Theatre Buildings**

### ***Barriers to accessing theatre buildings***

Many young people will regularly attend the cinema yet only 7% of young people go to traditional euro American theatre (Neelands & O'Connor, 2010; McAuley, 1999, p47).

Contributing factors to this lack of attendance are the wide perception that theatre is restricted to certain social classes or those who have been inducted into the fold, and that theatre buildings themselves can be intimidating to the uninitiated (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p29; McAuley, 1999, p47; Kershaw 1999:31-32 in Govan *et al.*, 2007, p7; Nicholson, 2011, p209). The Birmingham REP itself, with its broad glass front designed to be welcoming, and its impressive fly tower built to allow large backdrops, actually results in a structure which can be as daunting as it is impressive; as Lefebvre notes, “[...] verticality and great height have ever been the spatial expression of potentially violent power” (Lefebvre (1991,98,143) in McAuley, 1999, p53).

Accessing the theatre as an audience member may be intimidating enough, but theatres are also divided into two parts, with the front of house audience space being entirely separated from the backstage practitioner space, often with entrances on different streets (McAuley, 1999, p25-26). The separation of the dignified and the profane keeps access to the backstage area restricted - thus, penetrating the enigmatic world of ‘making’ theatre can, from the outside, seem impossible (Tuan, 1977, p41; McAuley, 1999, p67).

### ***Opportunities of theatre buildings***

*“[Julia] We have all these buildings that used to be closed to people, literally and metaphorically, and my job is, ‘how do we open them up?’” (Potts & Coventon, 2011, p177)*

The theatre space is neither static nor neutral, and what occurs in the space will impact on how the building is perceived (McAuley, 1999, p41). Therefore the more that young people and their work are included in the theatre building, the more this building will be seen as a place for young people and their work. Important reasons for ensuring that theatre buildings are not inaccessible places include ensuring future audiences; diversifying the sector and making it an artistically vital and healthy place (Blackman, 2010, p195; Nicholson, 2011, p209). Nicholson (2011) states that the most progressive theatres are engaging with young people and embedding learning and participation into the ethos of the theatre (p208). However, merely taking young people into a theatre is not enough for this to happen - the experience needs to be positive and they have to feel valued in that space (Nicholson, 2011, p209). A successful example of this is the Lyric Hammersmith, where the theatre's commitment to young people has meant that some of those young people now express a real sense of belonging in the theatre (Nicholson, 2011, p212). A youth theatre like the Young REP, which is directly connected to a theatre, thus opens up a whole range of opportunities for removing barriers to attending the theatre, giving young people a sense of cultural entitlement to the art form and a feeling of belonging in the building.

## **Conclusion**

Thus embedded in the assumed value of the arts and youth theatre for young people, this research will explore the pertinent theoretical issues outlined above. Drawing on the previously discussed theoretical lenses of multiculturalism, internationalism/globalisation, ethnicity, class, community and space, it will examine how accessible the Birmingham Repertory Theatre is to young people, the diversity of the Young REP groups, potential barriers to accessing the theatre/youth theatre, and whether the Young REP provides the liminal space that youth theatre is purported to.

## Conclusion to literature review

This literature review has explored the key sociological terms of: multiculturalism; race/ethnicity; internationalism/globalisation; class; community and space/place. It has examined the ways in which they intersect and overlap with one another and their relevance to this research.

During this chapter I have defined my use of the term multiculturalism as *the lived experience of diversity*, and noted that this has emerged as a result of internationalism and globalisation. I state that I will at times use fixed ethnic categories in order to explore this lived experience of diversity, but will problematise them where possible. Class has been shown to still be a relevant concept to this research but, like ethnicity, it should remain an open and fluid classification. I have examined the term community as contested but useful both in terms of the neighbourhoods that the youth theatre groups are located in and how they imagine the community of the Young REP itself. I have considered that the concepts of space and place have become increasingly relevant to postmodern theorists in regards to globalisation, and in the context of this research will be pertinent when exploring community, globalisation, diaspora, ethnicity, multiculturalism, cities, young people, theatre and youth theatre. This section has also highlighted the useful role that space/place analysis has to exploring the significant interplay between class, ethnicity and access to cultural institutions such as the Birmingham REP and the potential of liminal space or in-between-zones. Having considered the role and value of the arts, D&TE and youth theatre, I have also explored some of the potential barriers to accessing theatre buildings.

Having reflected on the key terms and areas upon which this research draws and explores, bearing them strongly in mind I will now outline my methodology and chosen methods.



## Chapter Four: Methodology

### Introduction

When faced with choosing my research methodology, I first reflected on Winston's assertion that "with any research question it is useful to consider 'who cares?', before embarking on it. Similarly, when considering the findings of a research report we should ask ourselves: so what? Such a report will be of little use unless it has some influence on future action" (Winston in Ackroyd, 2006, p59). I considered that the research will be of interest to: the members of the Young REP, schools who host Young REP groups, Staff at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre itself, those who run youth theatre groups, those who work with young people and to other theatres. Although the research concerns the particular case of the Birmingham REP, I hope that other theatres, youth theatres and people who work with young people will be able to find areas of interest that are relevant to them, and it will contribute to an on-going dialogue about the best ways to engage with young people from a wide range of backgrounds.

In order to be truly of interest to other people and an 'influence on future action', the research needs to go deeper than simply telling the story of The REP's relationship with its Youth Theatre groups. The location of the theatre (in a diverse metropolis), and its commitment to working with young people, presents pertinent and timely issues around engagement and dialogue which have far reaching resonance (as I outlined in the prologue). The aims and framing of the research necessitate a critical and rigorous exploration of methodology and methods, and as such requires an examination of the power dynamics and the reporting of research. The key theoretical lenses of multiculturalism and internationalism bring me face to face with the complex and highly contested term of globalisation, and this itself influences methodological choices.

Globalisation forces us to re-examine a priori assumptions, and to re-consider the

traditional western canon of research methods by introducing alternatives and provoking us to consider the hitherto hidden power dynamics in the research process. The research aims to engage with what are considered 'alternative voices' (Lather, 1991, p33), including young people and people who are 'othered', racialised and minoritised, and it acknowledges and explores the concept of the in-between-zone as a pertinent theoretical and methodological tool.

Working with young people brings up germane ethical and methodological issues around power. Involving young people in research in a way that challenges and seeks to limit imbalanced power dynamics is knotty but necessary, as Sarah Bragg (2010) notes: "seeing children as 'social actors', not as passive participants, has profound implications for those who work with children, particularly in how power relations between adults and children are conceived and experienced" (p46). It is also important to recognise that research with people who are minoritised brings with it issues of power and complexity, as Gunaratnam (2003) states, "seeking to recognize how 'race', ethnicity and other social differences are produced and have effects in qualitative interviews is undoubtedly difficult and messy work"(p104). Nonetheless she advocates that "[...]there is much to be achieved by distrusting any neatness, and actively searching out and valuing the complexity and richness that comes with the mess" (Ibid). With this in mind it is important to consider the rationale behind my selection of research methodology, methods and tools, and the epistemology behind these choices as I approach the research with an "epistemology of complexity" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p2).

## **Identifying a Worldview**

*"Epistemology is the study of how we know or what the rules for knowing are." (Scheurich, 1997, p29)*

It is easy to be enticed by such a neat definition into thinking that epistemology is neat and simple also. However in the 1980's epistemologies were challenged, politicised and reconsidered substantially, meaning that research is now taking place in a time when paradigms that are rooted in the Age of Enlightenment are being disputed, and Postmodernism can be regarded as the best option for the West to re-examine its own fundamental concepts of reality, research and knowledge (Scheurich, 1997, p2).

Therefore, whether you refer to them as *epistemologies; paradigms; ontologies; broadly conceived research methodologies* or *worldviews*, it is important to acknowledge that all research has behind it suppositions regarding actuality and knowledge, and that these assumptions in turn have profound impact on the research that is carried out (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p21). I choose to use the term *worldviews* which Creswell defines as “[....] ‘a basic set of beliefs that guide action’ (Guba, 1990, p.17)” and “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (Creswell, 2003) (Creswell, 2009, p6). Plano Clark and Creswell (2008) state that all research has an ideological basis for its investigation and researchers need to be aware of their own worldviews (p21). I will return to the importance of understanding the implicit worldviews a researcher brings to their research, but first it is important to outline what some of these broad worldviews are.

The four worldviews defined by Plano Clark and Creswell are *Post-positivism; Constructivism, Advocacy and Participatory; and Pragmatism* (2008, p22-23). In simplistic terms “Post-Positivism is often associated with quantitative approaches” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p22) and cause-effect thinking. Constructivism is “[...] typically associated with qualitative approaches” where research is shaped from the ‘bottom up’ and is informed by the social interactions of participants and their views (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p22). These are acknowledged to be subjective and used to form broad patterns and

then, in turn, theory. They see *Advocacy and Participatory* worldviews as having the ultimate goal of a change to the social world, and *Pragmatism* as being the most suited to Mixed Methods research approaches as the impetus is on the outcome of the research rather than the actual methods used (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p23). Although they identify how these different worldviews can be associated with certain methods, Creswell (2003) also cautions against seeing qualitative and quantitative approaches as dichotomous, suggesting rather that they are part of the same continuum, which is a point I will return to later (p3).

Other researchers believe that it is not enough to simply be aware of their own worldviews, and call for a rigorous exploration and understanding of the researcher's worldviews *and* an unpicking of the views inherent in the research methods themselves. The rationale behind this is the belief that research methods are all embedded within a hinterland of previous research, which constructs and re-constructs knowledge within existing (and often very well hidden) power structures. Law (2004) explores this concept meticulously and states that "[...] if we build our assumptions about the nature of good methods into our investigations of method then we are likely to come to conclusions that mirror these assumptions"(p40). He also notes that the methods, tenets and procedures construct the 'truth' that they claim to discover (2004, p5). These 'realities' are formed from values which Patti Lather (1991) believes are in turn embedded in 'science' "[...] linguistically, ideologically, and historically[....]"(p105). In short, if we keep doing what we have always done then we will always get the same results, and these results will be value-laden.

This has profound implications for the balance of power in research. Law (2004) sees this recreation of methods as a tool of the powerful: "the powerful (try to) insist that their statements are literal depictions of a single reality. 'It really is this way' they tell us. 'There is no alternative'" (p89). His position is that knowledge is seen by many to be 'fact' and

‘unchallengeable’ as it is continually proven through its reproduction, and he argues that, “[...]if things seem solid, prior, independent, definite and single then perhaps this is because they are being enacted, and re-enacted, and re-enacted, in practices”(p56). He highlights that this knowledge was itself originally constructed but that it is so embedded in current systems that we cease to see the origins.

This view that the methods are not impartially benevolent but organised to maintain their power is echoed by other postmodern researchers. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) express “[...]power works best when it is not recognized as power.”(p7). Patti Lather (1991) sees this as an active process of concealment and self-preservation, “foregrounded as an ideological ruse, the claim to value neutrality is held to delimit our concept of science and obscure and occlude its own particularity and interest[...].”(p105). Law (2004) goes on to note that these ways of seeing the world have so much resting on them that they seem impossible to topple and thus continue to hold their dominance (p38).

The acknowledgement of this power is one part of the postmodern research agenda. Those researchers who see method and methodology as intrinsically related to power concerns believe that it is impossible to totally remove ideology and advocate a transparency and open ideology, especially when working with marginalized groups (Lather in, DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, pp204 and 208). Due to the origins of research methods and methodologies in the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, postmodern researchers believe that they have embedded biases and connections to the Nation State, which exclude people from ‘other’ cultural backgrounds whether we intend them to or not (Lather in DeMarrais & Lapan, 2004; Scheurich, 1997, p14). To combat this Lather advocates ‘Critical Inquiry’, which acknowledges tensions between researchers and researched, encourages dialogue and interaction, and connects meanings to broader social and political contexts (inDeMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p209). Of course Critical Inquiry itself is

not free from the hinterland of research that Law describes. The research methods and studies that have gone before inform the research that comes after, and these past research methodologies were principally created by scholars who were white and in a specific social context (Scheurich, 1997, p143). Even when as researchers we try and structure our research in a global perspective, this perspective is often framed by concerns that are relevant to Europeans and structured around Enlightenment values (Kenway & Fahey, 2009, p30).

Advocates of postmodern research and academic discourse draw on the post-structuralists to trouble the past epistemologies that rest on the Age of Reason and the Industrial Revolution. Lather draws on Foucault to assert that current intellectuals are writing in an era which is renowned for troubling the formerly stable underpinnings of awareness and knowledge (1991, p6), and there is a move away from these former ways of thinking - from a found to a constructed world, one which sees the power alliances behind assumptions (Lather, 1991, p86 and p105). Researchers like Lather, Law and Kincheloe & Berry embrace this shift and offer alternatives to following traditional routes of research, which knowingly or unknowingly recreate existing epistemologies, and note that science is “[...]no more outside the power/knowledge nexus than any other human enterprise”(Lather, 1991, p105). Law also draws on writers such as Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze to discuss how they avoid assumptions about an external reality through which to know the world by using metaphors such as flux to describe the impossibility of pinning down anything in the way that science tries to (2004, p8-9). He makes statements about knowledge which recognize a shift in ontology: “The argument is no longer that methods discover and depict realities. Instead, it is that they participate in the enactment of those realities”(2004, p45). Postmodern researchers question the notion of an objective truth in favour of what they see as a multi-faceted reality and complexity, and this then effects the way in which they approach research (Lather, 1991, p51).

Indeed, the postmodern way of seeing the world is a complex one:

“The postmodern text is evocative as opposed to didactic; extended argument is displaced by what Barbara Johnson (1987) refers to as ‘a much messier form of bricolage [oblique collage of juxtapositions] that moves back and forth from positions that remain sceptical of each other though perhaps not always sceptical enough’ (p.4). Pastiche, montage, collage, bricolage and the deliberate conglomerizing of purposes characterize postmodern art and architectural styles”(Lather, 1991, p10).

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) conceptualise this term ‘Bricolage’, as it was used by Denzin and Lincoln (which they coined from Levi-Strauss) to describe a researcher who draws on a variety of research methods in order to challenge existing power dynamics that are inherent in research and the world. As they note:

“Appreciating research as a power-driven act, the researcher-as-bricoleur abandons the quest for some naïve concept of realism, focusing instead on the clarification of his or her position in the web of reality and the social locations of other researchers and the ways they shape the production and interpretation of knowledge”(p2).

They encourage bricoleurs to be aware of social, cultural and historical context and how they affect what we see as ‘understanding’ (2004, p4). The postmodern research paradigm is one of critique and consideration. Law (2004) argues that rather than simply using existing research methodologies unquestioningly, it is important for us to try and create new methods which are free from biases (p15), while Kincheloe and Berry (2004) want researchers to recognise that, “[...] knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed”(p79).

These epistemological assumptions form the basis from which I chose my methodologies and methods of data collection. I do not reject the other types of 'worldview', and indeed draw from many of their methods. I also closely identify with the *pragmatist* world view because the focus was not on adhering to a specific research methodology but on the meanings evolving from the research, and as such the methods were chosen to best suit the situation and the participant without a definite outcome in mind (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p23). I will return to this when I discuss the methods that I have chosen.

I do not, however, suggest that all of the constituent parts are separate. Instead I seek to explore the relationships between them (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p2 and p10), and not to be afraid of the complexity that this brings. As Law (2004) states, "it does not imply that reality is fragmented; instead it implies something much more complex. It implies that the different realities overlap and interfere with one another. Their relationships, partially coordinated, are complex and messy [...]"(p61). The bricolage also respects this 'mess' and is, as I stated above, "[...] grounded in an epistemology of complexity"(Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p2). Gunaratnam, as I have discussed, encourages researchers to explore the messy and the complex, and Lather (1991) sees the questioning of basic epistemological assumptions as an opportunity to create theories which do not subscribe to linearity and certainty (xvi). It is this complexity and depth of study that I am aiming for with my research, because it allows for an enhanced exploration of the case and for a multiplicity of views to be explored, which is especially pertinent when researching young people and minoritised groups where views can often be overlooked or disregarded.

Kincheloe and Berry (2004) note that, "The bricoleur understands that the frontiers of knowledge work best in the liminal zones where disciplines collide"(p80). Liminality, as discussed above, is a concept which is regarded as crucial in anthropological and sociological studies. Anthropologist Turner states that "liminal entities are neither here



nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” (Turner in Brown, 2002, p19). It is a key part of my research question to consider the potential of an ‘in-between zone’, and the relevance of the in-between to the theories, participants and spaces I was working with requires that it is a methodological as well as theoretical tool, and I will discuss this in more detail as I outline my methodology. Crucially, the research acknowledges that real life contexts *are* complex and messy - however, the research design itself is *not* messy, rather, it is carefully considered and enacted.

The overarching methodology I have chosen to use is case study, and I will now explore the history and evolution of case study and its main components.

## **Case Study**

*“Case study is a study of the singular, the particular, the unique”(Simons, 2009, p3)*

In keeping with the postmodern theorists I have discussed above, this research does not aspire to locate a reality which is ‘out-there’ waiting to be discovered, but rather to create a fuller picture of the working relationship between The REP and its youth theatres, and aims to do this by actively selecting the most appropriate research tools for the job, rather than passively accepting the ‘correct’ research methods as defined by tradition and precedent (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p2). Therefore, considering the focus and objectives of my research, I chose the over-arching methodology of case study, and specifically an ‘exploratory’ case study (Yin, 1993, p13) .

Case study has its origins in subjects including sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, law and medicine, and the research focuses on an individual naturally occurring case (Simons, 2009, p3; Stake, 1995, p2 ; Hammersley, 1992, p185). Robson (1993) defines it as, “[...]an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life

context using multiple sources of evidence”(p52). In line with Yin’s outline of the definitions of a case study, the ‘contemporary phenomenon’ of this case is the relationship between the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and its youth theatre, ‘multiple sources of evidence’ were collected, and the field work was conducted through the theoretical lens of multiculturalism. The study was situated within the national context of government policies and social analysis, the historical context of the arts in Britain and drama with young people, and focused on the Young REP in particular. I then further specialised by concentrating on cases within the case -three youth theatre groups.

A significant factor for choosing case study was its potential to engage participants in the process, which Simons (2009) sees as both political and epistemological as it, “[...] signals a potential shift in the power base of who controls knowledge and recognizes the importance of co-constructing perceived reality through the relationships and joint understandings we create in the field”(p23). The case study also supports the critical inquiry stance of being transparent about the ‘self’ and valuing multiple perspectives, discussed above (Ibid).

The use of case study furthermore challenges traditional notions of knowledge as being ‘out there’ and disrupts the onus of providing ‘proof’. The research questions posed were exploratory questions and did not expect to generate empirical answers. Yin (1993) advises that case studies are the favoured approach when asking ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions (p1). A space for the complexity I have discussed above is provided by case study as Stake (1995) acknowledges that, rather than a new comprehension being reached through case study, it is more often a modification of conception (p7).

However, the case study is not without disadvantages. The intense focus on personal matters can leave participants in a vulnerable position (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p459). Therefore it is imperative to be rigorous in ethical considerations and transparent with research participants as to how the research will be used and reported, and I will return to

this later. Case study is often criticised as 'too subjective' or particular, because it is not 'generalizable'. Lichtman (2011), however, is adamant that generalisation to populations is never the goal of qualitative research, and that this is not a weakness (p113). In addition Yin argues that the generalisation is not to particular populations but rather to expanding existing theories (Yin, 2003, p10-11). However, there are also arguments that particularisation *is* in fact possible: Eisner claims that "[...] making general observations from particular circumstances is precisely what we do in life" (Eisner in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p20). He goes on to profess that making connections between things, even when we were not involved initially, can be seen to be what defines human intelligence (Eisner in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p21). This claim is supported by Stake (1995), who argues that people are able to add the particular case to their present knowledge and use it to revise existing generalizations (p85). Joe Winston (1997) also notes that in regard to case studies, "Truth, with a capital T, or measurable certainty, are not their objectives but illumination and a broadening of understanding most certainly are"(p80). Therefore the case study can, and often does, have relevance beyond those involved in the original case.

Importantly, a dilemma which I myself have discovered is that "[Walker, 1986] the case study is locked in time while the people in it have moved on"(Simons, 2009, p24). Within the Birmingham Repertory Theatre there have been staff changes, members of the youth theatre have left and others have joined - therefore, it is important to frame the research within its own time scale and research it as such, and not claim that the contemporary phenomena remains static and unchanging, sealed in amber as it were. Conversely, it is also important to have an 'end' point of the research in order to be able to complete the project, as the risk is to keep getting drawn back in and never be able to finish.

Case study does not lie in either the qualitative or the quantitative research 'camp', rather the choice of methods from either 'camp' is decided pragmatically by how useful they are to the case (Simons, 2009, p5). I will now discuss the implications this then has on the potential to use mixed methods.

## **Mixed Methods**

*"The use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research"(Gillham, 2000, p2)*

The definition above shows why case study is a useful model within which to employ new and innovative methodologies - rather than seeking to find an 'objective reality', the use of multiple sources of evidence provides fullness and profundity to an enquiry (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p25).

Hammersley (1992) urges researchers not to see methodologies as competing traditions with conflicting approaches and their own innate congruence, rather he argues that all methods are available for selection on their merits for the particular research being undertaken (p196). As discussed above, Law regards methods as having inherent bias which enact realities and, in turn, the parameters of future research (Law, 2004, p38). Postmodern researchers who acknowledge this bias elect to choose a wide variety of methods from across research methodologies, and avoid situating themselves in strict quantitative or qualitative paradigms. Therefore, many researchers now use mixed methods and triangulation to try and counteract biases from one method, and thus the use of methods from qualitative and quantitative methodologies together is seen as beneficial (Creswell, 2003, p15). The inherent use of triangulation in mixed methods research is a key component in the rigour of the method.

## Triangulation

*“Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation”(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p454)*

The use of triangulation is seen as a crucial part of creating a trustworthiness of data (Lather, 1991, p66-67). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that multiple perspectives are a key factor in obtaining validity, which they claim is crucial to all case research, and that they are “[...] yet to meet case researchers unconcerned about clarity of their own perception and validity of their own communication” (p453). However, it is important to explore what is meant by this validity. Ritchie (2003) argues that there is no single reality of the social world, and thus “[...] the ‘security’ that triangulation provides is through giving a fuller picture of phenomena, not necessarily a more certain one” (p44). By ensuring that the methodological choices, analysis and reporting are all consistent and compatible with one another, and by using different perspectives and mixed methods to give triangulation to the findings being reported, the research has an internal consistence and thus validity (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p24,; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p454)

Therefore, following the ideas of Kincheloe and Berry to ‘tinker’ with existing research methods, I have used a range of research methods which cross the fields of quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p3). I will briefly outline the epistemologies and characteristics of these methodologies here, and will explore them in more detail when I describe the particular methods chosen from each.

## Ethnography

*“....the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic*

*manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (Bryman, A, Ethnography, 2000, p10).*

Emerging in the twentieth century, ethnography is not only a methodology but a style of research. Traditional ethnography has been criticised for being either too ‘un-scientific’ (by those who favour quantitative methods) or too self-reflexive to the point of evaporating under its own scrutiny. However, the definition provided by Bryman above does apply to my research setting - working with young people at their youth theatre sessions - and to my participation as a researcher in these sessions. The self-reflexive part of ethnography is important because it acknowledges the uneven power dynamics of research, especially as it has its roots in studies which involved people positioned as ‘other’ and in situations of domination and subordination. Crucially, modern ethnography “[...] considers the identity of the researcher and the relationship between researcher and researched, which is seldom one of equals” (Taylor, Ethnographic Research, 2002, p3). Although it is important not to be reflexive to the point of diminishing any worth in one’s research, this reflection is a key part of my research.

## **Ethnicity and ‘Race’**

*“In a very important sense, we white researchers are unconsciously promulgating racism on an epistemological level. As we teach and promote epistemologies like positivism to postmodernism, we are, at least implicitly, teaching and promoting the social history of the dominant race at the exclusion of people of color, scholars of color, and the possibility of research based on other race/culture epistemologies” (Scheurich, p146)*

As I have discussed above, research methodologies can be seen to harbour biases on an epistemological level, which have a profound impact on the balance of power and representation in research. Existing assumptions in and around research are often rooted in western ideologies which contain specific cultural and ideological biases. As they are so

deeply rooted, a researcher who seeks to undertake empowering research with participants may in fact deliver the opposite, as the methods exclude those people who are not articulate in the cultural vernacular (Scheurich, 1997, p1). As the research was undertaken with young people from a variety of ethnicities it is especially important to be aware of such issues. The theories and practices that I have outlined above should go some way to tackling this in my research, especially the acknowledgment of complexity.

Acknowledging complexity is a highly relevant part of the key theoretical lens of multiculturalism, which I have applied to this case study and explored in detail as a term in my literature review. The complexity that 'multiculturalism' brings is multi-layered, and includes the representation of those who have historically been 'othered' - as Lather (1991) notes, "[...] the formerly silenced have come to voice"(p33). These 'alternative' voices have helped to construct the postmodern epistemological discourse, and how we regard knowledge around 'race' and ethnicity (Lather, 1991, p33).

Some of my main research questions examine the issue of diversity with the Young REP, and therefore the terms ethnicity and 'race' and the specifics about researching within these areas have to be considered carefully, as I discussed in my literature review. As cited in my theoretical consideration of race and ethnicity, Gunaratnam (2003) outlines that the general distinction between 'race' and ethnicity is the former is seen as biological and the latter cultural (Gunaratnam, 2003p4). These terms have been challenged and troubled as over simplistic, and she highlights the tension between contesting the terms and contesting social inequalities:

"At the level of epistemology there can be related tensions between the need to work with highly defined categories of ethnicity in order to undertake research that challenges social inequalities, and the recognition that such categories are socially

and historically contingent and situated [...] these tensions are further intertwined with lived experiences of 'race' and ethnicity and with identity politics." (Ibid, p18).

As I highlighted above, Gunaratnam references Mohanty's dilemma that if you question the concept of race too much then it becomes hard to claim the experience of racism (Ibid, p6). The compromise for Gunaratnam is to draw on sociologist Avtar Brah's work on conceptualizing difference and to argue that "[...]while there must be temporary moments of closure in the defining of racial and ethnic categories in order to do research, these must also be opened up again in the process of doing research and in analysis" (Ibid, p38). A bricolage approach to this research is appropriate, because bricoleurs see the presence of different perspectives as a resource rather than a problem to be overcome (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p47).

Therefore, I do use the term ethnicity and refer to specific ethnic categories throughout my research in order to be able to explore diversity and multiculturalism, but I also work to trouble the boundaries of these classifications and to acknowledge the socially constructed and fluid nature of them. Bjorn (2009) notes that "minority groups may be seen as taking up liminal positions (willingly or not). To a degree, immigrant groups or refugees are liminal, being betwixt and between home and host, part of society, but sometimes never fully integrated" (p15). Thus liminality becomes a key theoretical component, specific examples of which I will discuss later.

As a white researcher I am also conscious of my own ethnicity and how this may affect my interactions with participants. Gunaratnam (2003) acknowledges that interracial research causes agitation emotionally and methodologically for researchers (p56). However, she troubles some of the assumptions that are made and specifically highlights that many of the traditional suppositions made about research subjects - such as the assumption that they are truthful and reliable- are turned on their head when subjects are racialized, when



they are then considered to be “[...] emotional, irrational, unco-operative and deceptive”(ibid, p73). Although she recognizes that there can be barriers between interviewers and interview subjects, she does not see this as an impediment to inter-racial research and, as discussed above, she sees value in distrusting neatness and in valuing complexity, drawing on Bahktin who states that if the only way of researching was to erase your own position it would cease to be enhancing and become repetition (Gunaratnam, 2003, p104 and p143).

Law, Lather, Kincheloe and Berry embrace the ‘messy’ and complex parts of research and believe that this complexity, when grappled with, gives a fuller picture of what is being studied. ‘Grand Narratives’ are supplanted by an array of complex, nuanced, and multifarious stories which allow for a deeper and wider reading of a study (Murdoch quoted in Spanos, 1987:240 cited in Lather, 1991, p5-6). Kincheloe and Berry (2004) see research as subjective and state that it is “[...] inscribed at every level by human beings”(p6). However, they encourage bricoleurs to use this subjectivity as part of the process of understanding their enquiry, and as such I acknowledge my own place within the research that I am undertaking.

## **Researching with Young People**

*“There has been growing criticism of mainstream qualitative methods that rely on verbal or written competence on the grounds that these provide limited access to the emotional and symbolic aspects of young people’s experiences and media-related modes of expression[...]new techniques] aim to shift the balance away from written or spoken word to visual or multi-sensory methods, which potentially allow a wider range of children to participate” Bragg (2010, p47).*

A large proportion of the participants of my research are young people aged between 11 and 25. This brings with it some ethical considerations, which I will discuss later, but also

some methodological considerations as outlined above by Sarah Bragg. The use of visual data, which I will discuss in detail later, can offer greater insights and understandings than the written or spoken word, and drawing on Bragg's assertions in considering my choice of research methods I was careful to select a range which encompassed drama, photography and drawing as well as interviews and questionnaires. When designing the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires I also considered some specifics that related to working with young people, which again I will discuss later.

Including the opinions of the young people was an integral part of the research; however, I am aware of not making bold claims along the lines of having 'given them a voice'. As Bragg (2010) notes,

"It is disingenuous to see children as finding, discovering, or being given a voice, as if we can simply access their authentic core being. What they say depends on what they are asked, how they are asked it, 'who' they are invited to speak as in responding; and then in turn, on the values and assumptions of the researcher or audience interpreting their 'voices'"(p31).

I was careful to give multiple opportunities for the input of the young people, but just as the voices of adults in the research have to be considered carefully, the same is true for the young people.

Navigating the power relations is difficult, and although I would consider that the young people were vital to my research, I would not go so far as to say that they were 'co-researchers' - I maintained a role throughout in which chose what to ask and how to ask it, and did not expect them to carry out research themselves in the form of interviewing or conducting questionnaires. I chose to take this stance as, if I were to offer them the role of co-researchers, I would need to acknowledge that they would face the same challenges as

any researcher, and as such would need some thorough research training (Bragg, 2010, p25). As I was unable to offer them this, the research they would have undertaken would have suffered as a result. This may have looked on the surface like I was creating a more equal power balance, but in fact the poor quality of their research would have negated it, and perhaps even reinforced a dynamic where they had less power. Rather, I chose to engage them in the research by offering a wide range of accessible research methods which I will detail below.

## **Voice**

*“[...] .how does the writer speak from ‘a decentred position of acknowledged, vested interest’ which strips the authority of one’s own discourse in order to ‘interrupt dominant and alternative academic discourses that serve Eurocentric, sexist, racist, and classist power relations’?”(Lather, 1991, p91)*

An important consideration in the analysis and writing of my research relates to the place of my voice in the research. As I have already discussed, self-reflexivity is a key part of case study and postmodern research, and is integral to the exploration of power in the research relationship (Lather, 1991, p66). In order to be able to explore a case study from multiple perspectives it is also important to be able to find “[...] ways of knowing that can take us beyond ourselves”(Lather, 1991, p2). Lather (1991) argues that

“The struggle, of course, is to develop a ‘passionate scholarship’ (DuBois, 1983) which can lead us toward a self-reflexive research paradigm that no longer reduces issues of bias to a canonized methodology for establishing scientific knowledge (Goddard, 1973:18; Cronbach, 1980)” (p62). It is also important to regard the role of data as not to ‘prove’ but rather to “vivify interpretation”(p91)

## **Conclusion**

In this section I have discussed the role of epistemology in research and discussed my own worldviews, which have led me to choose my research design. I have outlined the main research methodologies that I will be using and discussed issues of power and voice, specifically pertaining to young people and those who are 'othered'. In the next section I will consider my role as a researcher and important considerations regarding this.

## **My position as a researcher**

### **Reflection**

As I have discussed earlier, an awareness of my own position as researcher is crucial to a postmodern sense of reliability and legitimacy, which recognises how knowledge is historically positioned (Lather, 1991, p3). Thus, in order to enable contemplation across multiple methods, reflection is a crucial part of the research methodology (Gaye and Gaye in McIntosh, 2010, p46). Cohen and Manion (2007) caution against the risks of undertaking ethnographic field work by 'going native', as they worry that the researcher may lose their own perspective on the situation by identifying too strongly with the case subjects, which is where 'reflection' can be a vital tool of a researcher (p104). This supports postmodern research, which in a 'post-enlightenment culture' commands uncompromising reflection; Patti Lather, for example, draws on Rajchman to explain how the illusions of the generality of knowledge are discredited by 'the new canon' of self-reflexivity (Lather, 1991, p13-14). Therefore, part of the reflection process involved considering my own role in the research and interpretation of data, and being aware of my own consciousness (Stake, 1995, p41). This level of self-awareness is a key factor in acknowledging bias and guarding against errors going unnoticed or unrecognised (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p168). McIntosh (2010) highlights that reflection holds an important place as a method of growing human enquiry, which is distinct but not incompatible with 'measurable data' (p27). Rather than *erasing*

the self from the process through ensuring 'objectivity', he draws on Reinharz and sees reflexivity as neither conceited or anti-positivist but instead as a balance which allows for the acknowledgment of the self in fieldwork and a tool in its own right (2010, p50-51). Rather than trying to implement strategies to ensure 'objective' research, I acknowledge that a researcher's presence will have an effect on what they investigate. As Creswell (2003) states, "qualitative research is fundamentally interpretative[...] The researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific socio-political and historic moment" (p182). Recognizing this is a key part of undertaking high quality research, and as Gillham (2000) notes, ignoring it is bad 'science' (p7).

Reflection also allows research to exist in an in-between zone between the real and the unreal. As McIntosh (2010) notes, "Reflection leaves us with things that can be viewed both as real (for they are our own personal experiences which we live through when thinking of an event) and unreal (for precisely the same reasons, for they are not immediately evident and measurable, regarded only as a cognitive video that plays within our affective domain)"(p26). This postmodern approach of writing from the in-between zone or from a liminal location, as discussed earlier, allows for a position of useful reflection which may be liberated somewhat from prior hierarchies and structures. As such it is especially useful when using a lens of multiculturalism and internationalism when working with those who are minoritised and young people (Bjorn, 2009). I shared my early drafts of case studies with Steve Ball, Hannah Phillips and Rhys McClelland, and invited their responses to aid the reflection process (Winston, 1997, p85).

### **Being an Insider**

In line with this commitment to self-reflection it is important at this stage of discussing my research methods to consider my own position as a researcher.

I worked for The REP as a freelance drama facilitator for several years before commencing this research. I therefore had an existing professional relationship with several of the Learning and Participation department, including the Associate Director, Steve Ball. I had also facilitated several of the Young REP satellite groups, and when the field work commenced I was observing one satellite group which I had previously worked with. Several of the young people in *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* had worked with me previously and the contact teacher, Stephen Lane, was the same contact teacher when I had facilitated the group. This position offered both advantages and challenges.

### ***Potential of being an 'Insider'***

My previous experience of working for The REP means that I have a greater existing understanding of the way that the Young REP functions. It also meant that I had already established trust with key members of the team and at least one key contact teacher. When interviewing participants (especially those I had previously worked with) I was able to situate their comments historically and be aware of some of the past incidents to which they referred. I also had an existing rapport with some of the members of the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP*, even though I didn't spend much time with this group. Therefore, in the interview context they were more relaxed with me and able to discuss a shared knowledge of past experience.

I also had a REP email account, and this meant that I got a general idea of the day to day goings on of the company.

### ***Challenges of being an 'Insider'***

However, being an 'insider' also offered challenges. One of these was the potential for bias; I acknowledge that as I had a pre-existing relationship with Shenley Academy I was more familiar with them and I had more of an affinity with the group and a greater sense of 'where they are coming from'. I was more relaxed in rehearsals, certainly initially, and

therefore more approachable. This bias lessened as the field work continued and I got to know the other groups better.

It also brings up the issue that Kemmis (2006) raises regarding reporting, where it is important to be able to deliver 'non-positive' news, even if it is to someone you consider to be a colleague and/or a friend (p461). The more of an insider I was, the more I was in danger of finding it difficult to be critical. This is where reflection and triangulation were an important part of the analysis.

### **Being an Outsider**

I was also not entirely an 'insider', as many of the members of the Learning and Participation department had not been employed by The REP during the time that I worked there in a freelance capacity. Therefore they only knew me in a researcher role. They did know I had a historical role within The REP, but we had never worked together. Also, two of the case study groups, *Small Heath* and *14-18 Company 2*, had never worked with me directly before, and so they also only knew me in the capacity of a researcher. As I had been employed by The REP in a freelance capacity, I was never entirely an 'insider'. I was working from home visiting youth theatre groups in their schools, and therefore rarely visited the theatre building.

### ***Potential of being an Outsider***

Being an Outsider meant that participants in the research may have been willing to tell me things that they would not have done if they thought I was a permanent member of staff at The REP. I lost count of the amount of times I heard 'this is off the record, but [...]' from staff at schools and the theatre. Also, young people talked about the different facilitators that they had had over the years. Teachers sometimes spoke conspiratorially to me about their relationship to The REP. Furthermore, I was not being paid by The REP, and therefore I did not have the dynamic of 'employee' which offers the perceived threat of the potential

of loss of earnings if the results of the research were not 'approved of' by an employer (which intensifies Kemmis' point above).

### ***Challenges of being an Outsider***

However, being an outsider also meant that there were areas which I could not access, such as the back stage area discussed above, and sometimes in meetings things would be discussed that I was not aware of because decisions had been made when I was not around. For example, the decision not to create a joint piece of work between *Shenley* and *Small Heath*, was made by Stephen Lane and Rhys McClelland at a rehearsal I had not attended. When I found out about this decision I was initially disappointed, as I thought it would be very interesting for my work. However, I reflected that the production decisions should not be influenced by my own research agenda, and therefore it was probably better that I was not present when that decision was made, lest I would have unfairly influenced it.

### **An in-between role**

My role as part insider and part outsider also placed me in a liminal position. This 'in-between zone' gave me a privileged position where the rules are not as defined and there was a larger scope for creativity and exploration. As a researcher, my position was more akin to that of those I was researching, especially the youth theatre participants: I was 'in-between', and perhaps they were also, offering the potential for the power in the research relationship to be more evenly distributed and for new understandings to be reached.

In the next section I will consider the specific methods that I chose to use and the rationale behind these choices.

## **Methods**



Having discussed the methodological choices that I made I will now explore in more detail the specific methods that I chose, linking them to the epistemological and ontological themes I have previously outlined.

### **Participant Observation**

Observation is an integral part of case study research, as Cohen and Manion state:

“whatever the problem or approach, at the heart of every case study lies a method of observation” (Cohen & Manion, 1989, p101; Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p315). This is because it gives context and the possibility of noticing things that those embedded in the setting may not wish to discuss when interviewed (Patton, 2002, p263-264).

There are different types of observation, including overt or covert, direct or indirect and participant to non-participant (along a continuum I will discuss below)(Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p398). I chose to employ *participant* observation, which Ritchie (2003) describes as when “[...] the researcher joins the constituent study population or its organisation or community setting to record actions, interactions or events that occur”(p35). This meant that I was able to get a fuller picture of the Birmingham REP, and specifically Young REP, by *witnessing* events as they occurred and *experiencing* the events for myself (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p35). Therefore, in order to get as much experience of the cases as possible I attended many of the rehearsals of the groups I was studying, as well as at least one rehearsal of each of the other Young REP groups. I also attended Learning and Participation Department meetings, Away Days and REP performances in order to not only observe these extra facets of the case but also to be able to feel what it was like to be part of the setting (Patton, 2002, p268). As I already had a history of working in a freelance capacity for The REP this insider perspective was enhanced, and I will return to this in detail when I discuss ethical considerations. Cohen *et al* (2007) note that the roles of an observer lie on a continuum, “at one end is the *complete participant* moving to the *participant-as-*

*observer*, thence to the *observer-as-participant*, and finally to the *complete observer*" (p397). My role was as an 'observer-as-participant', as I was known to the group to be a researcher (overt) and joined in when I was present (participating in games at rehearsals, giving my perspective in meetings), however I was not in every session or daily event and so had less extensive contact than a 'participant-as-observer' would have (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p310).

Observation is not without its critics, and like much qualitative research it can be accused of lacking validity because it relies on the thoughts and opinions of one person (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p381). However, my decision to use observation as one part of many methods, including interviewing other people who were observing and participating in the same phenomena, meant that it became an invaluable tool for triangulation, and as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note, "Direct observation, when added onto other research yielding depth and/or breadth, enhances consistency and validity"(p382). Furthermore, I chose to video the sessions where I was facilitating the groups in the drama workshop, affording the opportunity to examine and re-examine the footage in detail (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p383).

### **Thick Description**

Observation is not simply about looking, but involves multiple and overlapping data collection strategies (Patton, 2002, p265-266). O'Toole (2006) states that observation involves the skills of "[...] listening, participating, contributing, pursuing, questioning, communicating, interacting, sharing, refraining, retreating, negotiating, timing, recording, describing, and so on"(p11). This is rooted in Clifford Geertz's (1993) seminal writings on 'thick description', in which he describes the heart of a researcher's observation as the "piled-up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way"(p7). In order to best gather 'thick description' I

immersed myself as much as possible in the Young REP rehearsals. and after each session recorded what I had observed and discussed with participants and facilitators (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p311). I chose to use semi-structured observation which allowed me to have a schema of topics, but to explore them in a less systematic manner than a highly structured observation method would, because the nature of the study was exploratory rather than searching for specific answers, and flexibility allowed new insights to emerge from the ground up (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). I chose not to make notes during sessions as this could be off putting for the participants, and would distract me from participating fully in the workshops (Patton, 2002, p304). It is important to include the feelings of the observer, as this has a useful role in comprehending a locale and the individuals that populate it (Patton, 2002, p264).

### **Multiple perspectives**

As I have discussed earlier, multiple perspectives are a key component of case study research and postmodern paradigms. For example, Eisner declares there are, “Multiple routes to multiple Romes”(in Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p22). The postmodern argument is that Western dichotomies are inadequate for comprehending a multifarious world, and that a bricoleur style researcher explores the different elements and the relationship they have to one another (Lather, 1991, p21; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p10). The methods I outline below are designed to gather these manifold perspectives.

### **Interviews**

In order to get as full a picture as possible of the cases I was exploring, one of my primary methods for data collection was the Interview. As I have stated above, this research seeks to get a fuller understanding of the case and as such the interview is “[...] the main road to multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p64). Interviews were useful for finding out about areas of the Learning and Participation Department’s work and the work of the theatre in other

departments that I did not have the time or capacity to observe. It was also enlightening to interview people from sessions that I was observing because we cannot see people's inner worlds, such as their intentions or the connotations they attach to incidents, and thus the interview allows us to garner someone's individual perspective (Patton, 2002, p341; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p36).

### **Semi-structured interviews**

I chose to use a semi-structured interview form, where I pre-wrote a list of set questions but also allowed interviewees to talk freely about relevant topics which emerged (Bell, 1993, p94). By compiling a list of open-ended questions it allowed me to make the most of limited time with each person I was interviewing, and ensure that I covered the topics that were pertinent to my research (Patton, 2002, p343). It meant that I could ask the same question to different interview subjects and thus gather different perspectives on certain topics in order to get a fuller picture of this area. However, I also allowed myself to ask questions which came up during the interview which explored emergent topics, and at times I entered into a more informal conversational mode. This was especially appropriate when interviewing the youth theatre directors, because it acknowledged the on-going relationship that I developed with the people I was interviewing and also allowed new areas of interest to develop from within the interviews which I may not have been aware of myself (Patton, 2002, p347).

### **Interview Design**

When designing the Interviews I was careful to develop genuinely open-ended questions, and questions that did not ask for simple yes/no responses. I ensured that my supervisor approved my interview questions before I conducted the interviews.

When interviewing the young people in groups of 5 it was important to have a strong structure of what I was going to ask, in order to keep us on topic in the short space of time.

However, I needed to be able to respond to what the young people were saying and allow them to converse with one another, as this can be an important tool for young people to engage, comprehend the topics being discussed, develop their views and establish an atmosphere which does not reinforce feelings of powerlessness on behalf of the young people (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p375).

### **Interviewees**

In order to get a wide range of perspectives, to inform the 'multiple realities' which Stake calls for to obtain as full a picture as possible, I interviewed a variety of people during the course of my research.

To situate the research in a historical perspective I interviewed Clare Cochrane, who has explored The REP archives and authored the book *The Birmingham REP: a city's theatre 1962-2002*. I was also able to interview Rachel Gartside, a previous head of the Education Department (from the 1990's), which was useful for obtaining a more detailed picture of the department at this time. This was useful because the 1990's was a pivotal time for Learning and Participation at the theatre, as it was when Arts Council funding first required the theatre to engage in dedicated outreach and community work. The current Learning and Participation department (L&P) grew out of the work undertaken at this time. I also interviewed Treveleyan Wright, who was Rachel Gartside's successor, but during the course of my research the recording was lost. It would have been beneficial to have had more interviews with previous REP employees, but unfortunately this was not possible as I was unable to contact any others.

I interviewed several (then) current members of the L&P department to obtain a picture of the variety of work that was being undertaken. This helped to acquire a broader picture of The REP's participation work. It was also useful to discuss their thoughts about the role of multiculturalism and diversity in the work that they were carrying out in order to develop a

fuller picture of the role that this played in the ethical and aesthetic considerations of The REP's work. I interviewed the Associate Director of Learning and Participation, the Education Officer and the Playwriting Officer. I also interviewed other members of The REP staff whose work overlapped, such as the Digital Officer, the Community Engagement Officer and the Associate Producer (BAMETI). This was valuable for seeing how the L&P department fitted into the work of the theatre, what other agendas were being pursued, and creating a fuller picture of the role and influence of multiculturalism and diversity in The REP's work.

As the Director of Young People's Theatre and the Youth Theatre Director were responsible for directing three of the groups that I was closely observing, I interviewed both of them at the start and end of the field work. We were able to discuss the specific groups that I was working with as well as the wider issues and themes. I also interviewed the Youth Theatre Director and the Director of Participation (a role that replaced the Director Young People's Theatre) a year and a half after my field work had finished, in order to reflect on the changes that had occurred in the Young REP over this time.

It was important to interview the contact teachers at the two schools that hosted youth theatre groups, as they were highly involved with the groups and offered another perspective.

Within the three Young REP groups I also selected (with the input of their teacher and/or youth theatre director) 5 young people whom I felt represented a range of ages, genders and diversity, to interview as a small group about their experiences and thoughts with the Young REP.

Important elements to be aware of with interviews includes the distorting effects of power, for example those with high status perhaps fearing embarrassment, or those with low

status perhaps answering in a way that they may perceive will grant favour (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p151). Other dynamics such as the emotion of the person being interviewed at the time, recall error and self-serving answers may also have an effect on what is said in interview (Patton, 2002, p306). It was therefore important to employ critical reflection when analysing the interviews to account for and explore these possibilities, and of course my own field notes and the multiplicity of people interviewed helped to reflect on how representative the views were.

### **Reflection on transcripts**

At the start of each of the interviews with the adult participants I informed them that I would send them a copy of the transcript that they could read over in order to let me know if there was anything that they did not want to be quoted on. This was designed to put them more at ease and allow the conversation to flow without as much fear of saying something they would later wish that they hadn't, and to ensure that they were comfortable with the use of what they had said when given the chance to reflect upon it (Patton, 2002). I chose not to offer this to the young people, as reading a transcript of oneself talking can be a disempowering experience. I had to work hard with the adult participants to reassure them that it was perfectly normal to seem 'incoherent' and 'muddled' when reading back a transcript, as we do not talk as we write, and seeing the talking in a written medium can seem disjointed. I felt that this could be a negative experience for the young people. It also made a difference that they would be reading not only their own but each other's transcript, as they were interviewed in groups and this could leave the young people in a more vulnerable position.

### ***Focus groups***

At the beginning of my research I conducted a 'focus group' or steering group of participants from the Young REP. The Director of Young People's Theatre was already

planning to hold this group as she saw it as an important way of eliciting the wants of the Young REP members, especially around the identity of the Young REP, which was an area she was concerned with developing. It was agreed that I would design the questions and she would review them. Having reviewed them it was established that they covered the topics she was also interested in discussing with the young people. At the end of the session she asked some supplementary questions concerning what shows they had seen at The REP and why.

I decided to hold this focus group because it offered an efficient way to produce a significant amount of data, and also because it would allow the young people to have a discussion between themselves, which, although guided by my questions, was essentially a dialogue between them (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p288). This afforded me the opportunity to see how the young people from the different groups interacted with each other and discussed topics which they might have had different opinions on, such as their relationship to the theatre building. This gave me a context for exploring any differences in opinions between the different groups, and how this might or might not have tied into the locations of their groups and experiences of The REP. Focus groups are an important arena for this because, “[...]participants get to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say”(Patton, 2002, p386). It was also an event which the Director of Young People’s Theatre wished to host regardless of my research, because she saw it as an important part of formulating a positive Young REP identity.

We invited people from all of the Young REP groups, and apart from 1st Chance and 16-25 each group had at least one representative. I kept the group focused with a set list of questions, and moderated the group making sure that people had a chance to express their opinions (Patton, 2002, p388 - 390). It was intended by both me and the Director of Young



People's Theatre to arrange more of these focus groups, and Hannah did conduct one on branding that I was unable to attend. However, further steering group meetings did not come to fruition, mainly due to the logistics of bringing the young people from the different groups together at a time and place that suited them all.

The focus group situation for an interview also has its limitations, including a limited amount of time for responses, a lack of confidentiality, the risk of certain voices dominating, and some people maybe not wanting to share a view they may perceive as in the 'minority' (Patton, 2002, pp86, 387, 388). I was aware that some voices did risk dominating the discussion and my skills as a drama facilitator were definitely useful here. However, in some ways the interaction and dominance of certain voices formed part of the research and supported other parts of the data.

### ***Questionnaires***

Questionnaires are useful because they "[...]can be designed and used to collect vast quantities of data from a variety of respondents" (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p8). They also give participants the chance to answer questions anonymously, and thus hopefully remove some of the temptation to answer as they think the researcher might 'want them' to. Therefore, given the numbers of young people involved and the fear of 'correct' answer giving in interviews, I used a number of questionnaires during the course of my field work.

### **Questionnaire Design**

I chose to use questions which required responses on the Likert scale because of the advantages that they bring, as Cohen (2000) notes "[...] they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis. They afford the researcher the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality" (p253). There are potential challenges when using the Likert

scale, such as the risk of pattern answering and a reluctance to answer at extreme ends of a spectrum (Brace, 2004). In order to counteract this, when designing the questionnaire I paid close attention to what I asked, how I asked it and in what order. I avoided using loaded questions, alternated between positive and negative statements to discourage people from just ticking down the line, and started off with less personal questions in order to avoid creating a 'mood-set' where the participant may feel threatened or intruded upon, and instead built up to more personal information gradually (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p257). I then had the questionnaires approved by my supervisor to see if I had succeeded in the questionnaire design, the youth theatre directors and (where appropriate) the contact teacher to ensure I had pitched the questions appropriately.

I designed the first questionnaire to give to *Shenley Academy Junior Young Rep* group and the two other junior groups (central and Northfield) before they performed at The REP in *Secrets and Gardens*, and I then designed a follow up questionnaire for after the performances. However, I then decided not to ask the two other junior groups to complete the post-performance questionnaire and not to analyse their pre-performance questionnaires, as I was not going to continue to observe them and thus it represented a divergence from my main case study groups which did not contribute to my research. Their younger age also made it difficult to ask comparable questions of them and the teenagers at *Shenley Academy* in order to make questionnaires worthwhile. However, these questionnaires acted as a pilot as well as gleaning 'before and after' responses from *Shenley*. I also designed a third questionnaire which I gave to *Shenley, Small Heath* and *14-18 Company 2*. This included some of the questions from the first questionnaire, as well as additional questions, and was designed to gather demographic information and attitudes to The REP, their community, technology and the wider world. Lastly, I designed questionnaires for the young people attending the *Positive Futures* workshops.

## **Implementation**

I handed the questionnaires out at the end or start of one of each of the participating group's workshops, at a time that was convenient for the youth theatre director. The participants were asked to complete them there and then. This meant that the likelihood of achieving the completion and return of all of the questionnaires was much higher than sending them away with the young people to complete in their own time. However, they were also aware that the questionnaires were not compulsory as it is important, as Cohen et al (2000) explain, that "[...] respondents cannot be coerced into completing a questionnaire. They might be strongly encouraged, but the decision whether to become involved and when to withdraw from the research is entirely theirs" (p245). On a couple of occasions young people asked me to explain what questions meant. This was a difficult task to undertake as I was worried that I would bias their answer. However, equally I did not want them to be excluded from completing the question because they did not fully understand what they were being asked. Therefore, I first asked them what they thought it meant so I could then verify their answer. Where they still needed it to be explained, I was conscious to use neutral language that avoided bias.

I informed the participants that they were not to write names on the questionnaires so that their answers would be anonymous. However, some young people did write their name, possibly out of 'habit'. I also suggested that in the ethnic origin section they could write their own if there was not a suitable one. The layout of this (several boxes each containing a section, see appendix 4) confused some participants who thought they needed to tick something in every box. Also, a couple of young people did not know what their 'ethnic origin' was, and I had to try and ascertain this with them sensitively. This was partly due to

my assumption that they would know how to describe their ethnic origin and also would be familiar with the concept of this type of question, which evidently several participants were not (mainly the younger ones).

### ***Visual research methods***

As I discussed with regard to involving young people in research, it is important to use a range of research methods which encompass visual and kinaesthetic expression as well as verbal and written. This enables people to engage with the research regardless of their literary confidence and also adds another significant dimension to the research. As McIntosh (2010) notes, “[...]the action of engaging in creativity, such as the arts or humanities, enables forms of observation and questioning which could never emerge out of other forms of enquiry or practice” (p184).

Visual data in research can be traced back to early anthropological studies - uncomfortably from a postmodern perspective today, it has its roots in documenting ‘differences’ between races and to ‘understand’ criminals and the ‘insane’. However, it has continued to be used by sociological researchers to capture ‘more’ than words alone can, especially as technology has become more affordable and accessible. There have been significant changes in the way visual data is now used, including the uses of technology and an emphasis on participants having more agency in the production of visual data (Banks, 2007). I chose to use visual data because as Banks asserts “[...]a study of images or one that incorporates images in the creation or collection of data might be able to reveal some sociological insight that is not accessible by any other means” (Banks, 2007, p4).

### ***Postcards***

With this in mind I was inspired by Noel Greig’s work as described in *Young People, New Theatre* (2008), where he uses various techniques to encourage a creative dialogue in and between groups. I asked the participants in each group to think about words and images

that expressed the substance of their Young REP group, and then asked them to create a postcard which would “[...]give an ‘essence’ of who you are as a group” (Greig, 2008, p27). We then placed them together in the centre of the room and discussed them. At first I imagined that, like the participants in Greig’s work, they would see the postcards of the other groups. However, as the research progressed I realised that this was more of an intervention and therefore not appropriate for me to do as a researcher in my specific role. By carrying this out as a group, however, it gave me as the recipient of the postcards an idea of how they regarded their group, and what they saw as important in the identity of it.

### **Photographs**

As Bragg (2010) notes, “Cameras and photographs are increasingly used in research or participatory projects and consultations, to produce images for illustration, historical evidence, visual record, or stimulus material” (p36). Before The REP building closed for two years I took the opportunity to ask representatives from each of my case study groups to photograph the areas of The REP that they considered to be important to them. I did this for several reasons, firstly as a methodological tool to discover how they related to The REP by seeing what they chose to photograph; “[...]children have taken their own photographs of important places and people in their local or school setting, or as a tool to explore their experiences of the wider environment.” (Bragg, 2010, p36). I accompanied them as they did this for several ethical and methodological reasons. This was to minimise some of the ethical considerations with photography, such as the participants or other young people being in the photographs (I specified that the photographs should not have anyone in them). Furthermore The REP’s health and safety and child protection policy rightly stipulates that young people need to be accompanied when back stage, and additionally so that I could hear the dialogue around choosing what and where to photograph, as this was an important part of understanding and interpreting the images they captured. It was significant that there were times when we were not able to access parts of The REP

building, and this effected where they were able to photograph. For example, the rehearsal rooms had been demolished, on one occasion Front of House was closed, and on two other occasions we could not gain access back stage as performances were taking place – one of the complications of working with an operational theatre. There was also a delicate series of negotiations with the Theatre Manager to gain access, and my position as ‘outsider’ felt apparent at these times as I was not allowed to take the young people backstage without a REP member of staff accompanying me.

The second reason for asking participants to take the photographs was to offer a chance for the young people to express their experiences which might not have been expressed easily by other means (Bragg, 2010, p36). Expressing a relationship to a building is a complex thing to do, and by offering this additional tool it provided an opportunity for them to demonstrate their relationship to The REP in alternative ways to verbalising it.

The final reason was to use the photographs as a stimulus during the drama research workshop that we carried out later in the field work. This then had the dual role of allowing me to further understand the choices of the photographers, and to act as a visual stimulus for all of the young people in the group (not just the photographers, whose numbers were limited for logistical reasons) to demonstrate their relationship to The REP building through drama. It also gave the opportunity for them to express any areas of The REP that they felt were ‘missing’, either because they had not had access to them (as detailed above) or for more abstract reasons.

The levels of meaning making that occur with arts based methods are significant, as McIntosh (2010) states: “I believe two forms of looking occur in the approach I am advocating. First, that which occurs in the active imagination process; and second subjecting the works to a metaphorical analysis”(p159). These approaches permitted the young people to express themselves in alternative ways to the verbal and written forms,

facilitated them to explore their ideas creatively and provided me with the chance to explore these creative processes theoretically (McIntosh, 2010, p90).

### ***Drama Workshops***

The postmodern shifts in how research is approached has opened up a dialogue which encourages and includes creativity (Kershaw in Smith & Dean, 2009, p105). Creativity is seen as offering a dynamic encounter with the world, which matches a general shift away from conceptual positioning and pure scientific sagacity to experiencing the world hands on whilst questioning what knowledge is and how it is produced (Smith & Dean, 2009, p1).

O'Toole explains how Clifford Geertz in the 1980's shone a light on the mixing or blurring of genres in anthropology, which encourages a more flexible, dynamic and creative way of exploring phenomena which has been adopted fervently by critical theorists, constructivists, feminists and post-structuralists. Thus the arts, and specifically drama, are an exciting medium for research, both ideologically and methodologically. O'Toole (2006) notes that in contemporary western society research methods have evolved to respond to the troubling of what we know and the uncertainty of what is knowledge, and this offers a possibility for drama, as a principal component of all drama is comprehending the self and others (p13). He recognises the strong bonds between research and drama and the opportunities that this provides for both drama and research.

Learning through drama or participating in drama requires an active engagement of the head and heart. Therefore, by using drama as a research tool, the participants are actively involving themselves in a more holistic manner than when completing a questionnaire or being interviewed (Clifford & Herrmann, 1999, p16). As drama is also a group process, it offers the space for dialogue and exchange to take place, and thus meanings to be challenged and developed (Clifford & Herrmann, 1999, p17). Using drama to explore the relationships that the young people had with The REP, the participants were able to

explore their feelings about this at the same time as I was observing their creative responses. As Carey *et al* (1994) discuss, “Drama is an essential form of behaviour in all cultures which allows for the exploration of issues and problems central to the human condition and offers the individual the opportunity to define and clarify their own culture”(piii). Drama also has strong elements of liminality. Turner describes how Richard Schechner sees the rehearsal process as an in-between zone, where the actor is not-me and not-not-me and experimentation is possible (Turner, 1982, p93). There is also the opportunity to play with things and disrupt preconceived statuses and so there was, I hoped, a greater potential for the young people to honestly explore their relationship with The REP (Turner, 1982, p27). Crucially this research took place with participants of youth theatre, and *The Playing a Part* report on participation in youth theatre published in 2004 embraces Victor Turner’s definitions of Liminal and Liminoid as activities with “[...] freedom of expression, a non-institutionalized space, an opportunity to explore and reinvent identity” and as being “identified with young people’s and youth theatre leader’s definitions of youth theatre”(Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p69). Taking place at a school outside of school hours, neither part of home nor formal education, youth theatre can be seen to occupy a liminal space within which to explore.

Drama’s presence also supports the complex and multifarious, as Philip Taylor (1996) recollects in a key moment in his own research practice: “[...] it was later suggested to me by Professor Margaret Ely, ‘Surely your background in drama, Phil,’ she asserted, ‘would tell you that human activity is multi-dimensional and complex. How could you ever hope to study an aesthetic moment by drawing on a conventional scientific instrument?’”(p26).

I do not regard my research as practice-as-research or research-led-practice. However there are links with these research paradigms as, by using drama as a research tool, I was aligned with an approach which sees creative work is a form of research in its own right,



with demonstrable results (Smith & Dean, 2009, p5). Advocates of research-as-practice such as Smith and Dean (2009) note that art as a research tool allows inquiry to grow out of reflection and creativity (p51). The drama workshops enabled the young people to engage in action and reflection and for me to further reflect on this creative process. O'Toole (2006) notes that the process of drama and playmaking offers abundant opportunity for understated but refined data collection (p110).

My background as a drama facilitator, and the fact that the young people that were participating in the research were all members of the Young REP, meant that drama as a research tool was highly appropriate. The participants, the youth theatre directors and I would be comfortable with the medium in a way that participants from outside of a drama group might not be, and that they might not be with other research mediums. In order to design the drama workshops I collaborated with the directors of the groups. This was important as it allowed them to input their knowledge about the group and what they would respond well to, and to use their own facilitation expertise in the design. It also meant that when we delivered the workshop, the participants would be working with one facilitator whom they were familiar with, and increased the chance that the facilitator could feel included in the research process.

The role of drama within this case study, both as a phenomenon to be observed and as a research tool, brought with it its own power dynamics and contentions, specifically regarding class and 'belonging'. I will discuss these in much more detail later, but for now I will quote Boal (1998): "[...] theatre cannot be imprisoned inside theatre buildings [...]; the language of theatre and its forms of expression cannot be the private property of actors [...]"(p19). This statement is particularly interesting in the context of the youth theatre groups based in school buildings.

### ***Identity Descriptors***

As I have begun to explore above, the study of ethnicity is a key part of my research, and one which requires thorough critique and deconstruction.

When conducting the questionnaires I gathered data on 'ethnic origin'. As Gunaratnam (2003) notes, "[...]as much as I feel uncomfortable in recognizing it, methods that employ essentialist categories of 'race' and ethnicity do have some level of resonance with lived experiences[...]" (p35). However, I always made sure I stated that if there was not a category that participants felt 'matched' them, they could write their own, because, as Gunaratnam goes on to say in the above statement, it should be attended to with rigour (2003, p35).

It is important to continue to trouble essentialist notions of race and ethnicity because, as Bjorn (2009) notes, minority groups are often in liminal positions between belonging and being considered outsiders (p15). Therefore, to try and avoid falling into traps of reproducing essentialist categories (and with them unequal power relations), research needs to take on the form of 'doubled' research, wherein it both connects to lived experiences but also challenges identity categories (Gunaratnam, 2003, p32-35; Lather, 1991, p30). This is where the liminal can become a methodological tool, and with this in mind I drew on Kathleen Gallagher's (2007) tool of offering research participants the chance to write their own "Identity Descriptors" (p9). I offered this to all of those that I interviewed, including the young people that I interviewed from each group. I started by reading my own identity descriptor as an example. I contemplated whether this would bias what they included in their own descriptions of themselves, but decided that as it was a concept that would probably be new to them, it was fairer to give them an example of what I meant, and I stated that they could include whatever they felt was relevant.

In the first group interview I gave them the opportunity to verbalise their own descriptor after I read out mine, but apart from one participant they were very reluctant to do this.

When I offered them the chance to write it down they were all happy to do so, and so I used this technique for the other young people. I imagine that this was a combination of being 'put on the spot' (where I had had a chance to write mine beforehand) and possibly a reluctance to share this information with the rest of the group. For the adult participants, I emailed them my example and asked them to email me back their own descriptor if they wished to. I made it clear that it was voluntary and that they could include whatever they felt comfortable with. I also stated that it by no means suggested their identity was fixed, as Gallagher (2007) notes on her use of descriptors:

"I have elected[...] to include the social markers at the risk of fixing identities in ways I do not intend and with the proviso that their two dimensionality is a convention of writing, which always confines the multiplicity of subject positions that we occupy in any given circumstance"(p9).

As I have discussed above, young people are also often considered to be liminal – in between childhood and adulthood, transgressing from one state to another and developing their identities. The use of identity descriptors allowed me to try and navigate this transgressive state with them.

## **Ethics**

As with any research project, ethical issues were carefully considered before starting the field work, during it and when analysing the data.

### ***Informed Consent***

It is necessary to gain informed consent from participants of research, defined as thus by Diener and Crandall cited by Cohen *et al.*

"[...] as 'the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their

decisions' (Diener and Crandall, 1978). This definition involves four elements: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension" (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p51).

Informed Consent has an extra layer when working with children and young people.

"Seeking informed consent with regard to minors involves two stages. First, researchers consult and seek permission from those adults responsible for the prospective subjects; and second, they approach the young people themselves"(Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p52). The layers of consent that I obtained were firstly from The REP via Steve Ball, who then sent an email to all staff members informing them that I would be carrying out the research; secondly, from the contact teachers at the two schools, who then obtained permission from the head teachers. I provided a research description for them to peruse when making the decision about whether the research could take place. Thirdly, I distributed letters explaining the research to all of the Young REP members. I talked to them about the research and invited questions. The letters included a consent form to be signed by both child and parent/carer. I also stated a date and time when I would be available to talk to parents/carers about the research, and provided an email address to contact me (incidentally, nobody took me up on either of these offers).

It took a considerable amount of time and effort to obtain all of the permissions. Young people frequently forgot them or lost them. In the meantime I was observing sessions as I had the permission of the school to do so - however, I did not ask young people who had not returned consent forms to fill out questionnaires. When it came to conducting the drama research workshops, some young people had still not returned their consent forms but did want to take part. To exclude them from the research would mean they either had to go home (when a parent/carer would be expecting them to be at Young REP) or sit in the room but not participate, which could make the young people participating feel self-

conscious. Instead we made the decision to call and obtain verbal permission from parents/carers for them to take part. This was a difficult decision to make as it lessened the certainty that we were obtaining permission from the correct person (but then how do we know that from a signature either?) and that they definitely were adequately 'informed'. However, as Frankfort-Nachimas and Nachimas are quoted in Cohen et al (2000) "The principle of informed consent should not be made an absolute requirement of all social science research. Although usually desirable, it is not absolutely necessary to studies where no danger or risk is involved"(p51). I felt that the research did not pose risk. I had made considerable effort to notify participants and their parents/carers, and had informed them all that the video would not be made public and would be for my reference and the reference of my supervisors/examiner only. No young people were allowed to participate in the workshop if we did not have a completed consent form or at least speak to a parent to gain verbal consent. On one occasion it was not 100% clear that the parent (mother) had a strong enough grasp of English to understand what she was consenting to. However, she stated that 'if it is at school that is fine with me'. As the school had agreed to the research and the parent was happy to trust the school, we allowed the two participants to be involved.

### ***Child Protection***

When working with young people it is essential that child protection procedures are followed. There are strict and thorough guidelines in The Children Act 1989 and 2004 which I already followed from my role as a drama facilitator, and I continued to uphold these throughout the research process<sup>24</sup>. I applied for a CRB form before entering any contexts with young people, and my CRB was viewed by The REP and the schools before I was allowed entry. I made stringent efforts never to be alone in a room with a young person, and if this occasion did arise I made sure a door was open and I was visible to those outside

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/00305-2010DOM-EN.pdf>

the room at all times. When interviewing the young people I always interviewed them in small groups.

The videos and photographs that I have taken will not be used publically and are stored securely to be destroyed at a later date.

When at The REP taking photographs, I accompanied the young people in a small group at all times, in line with the theatre's safeguarding policy.

### **Confidentiality**

The issue of confidentiality in this research is a complex one. Usually in social science research it is expected that you disguise the site of the research and all participants.

However the nature of this research is the context of Birmingham, and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre are integral to it (Patton, 2002, p412). Therefore I have permission to be open about the location of the research. This however means that it is difficult to offer confidentiality to the participants. In the case of the adult participants, I gave them the option to be referred to by their name and job title or just their job title. This will still make it fairly easy to identify them, but it gives a layer of identity protection for those who requested it. They were also made aware of this at all stages of the research, and with this in mind, as discussed above, they were given the opportunity to read their interview transcript and remove anything that they did not in hindsight wish to be quoted (Patton, 2002, p412).

For the young people I have ensured confidentiality in that I will not use their real names, and any video or photographic data will not be made public. However, the name of the theatre and the schools are used; thus, if someone were to want to, they could probably deduce who was likely to be being referred to. However, as the information being gathered is not of a particularly sensitive nature, and I am sensitive in the selection and reporting of any data which could be deemed more sensitive, the costs/benefits ratio falls

in favour of keeping the layers of confidentiality/openness as they are (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p65).

## **Analysis**

As this was a mixed method case study which used both quantitative and qualitative data, the analysis was facilitated by the software packages NVivo and SPSS. SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data in the form of the questionnaire responses. I used NVivo as a tool to help me navigate the vast quantities of qualitative data, as Pat Bazeley (2007) notes:

“The computer is not intended to supplant time-honoured ways of learning from data, but to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of such learning. The computer’s capacity for recording, sorting, matching and linking can be harnessed by the researcher to assist in answering their research questions from the data, without losing access to the source of the data or context from which the data have come”(p2).

I imported all of the interview and video transcripts alongside photographs, postcards and my field notes, and coded the data according to key themes such as ethnicity, class, space and community. I also coded it according to the case study group, and where it addressed specific questions such as the relationship a group had to the building. I was then able to see all of the data which pertained to the question or theme in one place.

The use of several different sources has been a key factor in obtaining triangulation to assist with the validity of my research findings. Joe Winston (1997) draws on Taylor’s concept of crystallization as an alternative to what he sees as the positivist idea of triangulation, and explains the importance of time in obtaining it: “time distanced me from the immediacies of the experience and provided a gap wherein different experiences,

thoughts, readings and conversations were given the conceptual space to inform my critical responses before beginning the formal analysis”(p84). Like Winston, being able to return to video recordings of the research workshops alongside my field notes aided the reflective element of the analysis. Also like Winston, the writing process was an important part of the analysis itself, and I sent early drafts of my case studies to the youth theatre director, Director of Young Peoples Theatre and to The REP’s Associate Director, Steve Ball, for their reflections. These in turn informed subsequent redrafts and, as Winston notes, deepened the “[...]process of crystallization” (Winston, 1997, p85).

## **Conclusion**

*“[...] the crucial questions in the choice of research methods surround the nature of the information that the research needs to provide.”(Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p34)*

The choice of methods outlined above were carefully made, based on an empirical and ontological view that embraces postmodern endeavours to be critical and reflective of research methods and what we mean by ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding.’ In the next section I will present an analysis of the data gathered using these tools.



## Chapter Five: Analysis

### Introduction

The analysis of my research findings will take the form of three case studies, each exploring one of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's youth theatre groups (Young REP). The case studies will consider potential barriers to access, the ethical and aesthetic decisions made by the theatre, and the relationship that the young people have with the theatre, both with and without a building. Although the following themes will emerge in all of the case studies, the first case study will focus on *Small Heath Young REP* and specifically explore the role of ethnicity. The second will examine *Shenley Academy Young REP* with consideration given to the effect of class. The third will analyse *14-18 Company 2 Young REP*, examining the relationship between a youth theatre and the theatre building it regularly rehearses in and how this is affected when the building is closed. The consideration of space and place is an important part of this investigation, as Nicholson (2011) notes:

“Theatre education always involves a negotiation of different organizational structures, cultural practices and interpersonal relationships, and place and space have become increasingly important concepts through which to interrogate theatre and performance practices”(p11)

As I outlined in the methodology section, I asked all of the staff members and the Young REP participants that I interviewed to provide identity descriptors. The relevant descriptors for each case study are at the beginning of each section. I have chosen not to include them in brackets after the name of each individual (as Kathleen Gallagher does) as the descriptors were fairly long and it interrupted the flow of the writing. I did not want to edit them to make them shorter, as I felt that having asked people to supply them I should

maintain them in the way that they were written, lest I risk imposing my own hierarchies on the information given.

I gave staff members the option of being referred to by name and job title or just by job title. Therefore, where only a job title is given, this is because the staff member requested for their name not to be used. I promised anonymity to the young people involved as their position as minors marked them as vulnerable. I also wanted to minimise the risk of them editing their responses due to the power dynamics of youth talking to adults, and any fear of repercussions this entails (Bragg, 2010, p29). However, it was in the process of analysis that I reflected that I should have asked them to provide their own pseudonyms (Gallagher, 2007, p9). Due to the nature of youth theatre, many of the young people were no longer at this point attending Young REP, and so rather than have an imbalance where some chose their own pseudonyms, I decided to choose them myself. I was conscious of the potential of choosing culturally inappropriate names, and to minimise this I chose pseudonyms which cultural origins matched their original names.

## **Case Study One: Small Heath Young REP**

**How does ethnicity impact upon the ethical and aesthetic decisions that the Birmingham Repertory Theatre make about their youth theatre, and the way that young people relate to the theatre building?**

*“It is no longer sufficient to accept that the stranger is a temporary guest whose presence and company should be tolerated. We may need to acknowledge that this guest could also be a resident in our public space, and that he or she could be the most potent interventionist in making us imagine other modalities of meeting that have not yet been envisioned in our dominant world views” (Bharucha, 2000, p159)*

*“Difference must not be tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependence become unthreatening[...](Audre Lord cited in Giroux, 2009, p254)*

*“If theatre mirrors life it should also reflect accurate impressions of cultural diversity. Theatre groups incorporating people with diverse backgrounds should be central to artistic endeavour, thus promoting an inclusive and generic approach to human diversity in arts and education” (Laughton & Johnson, 1996, p40)*

### **Introduction**

This case study will explore the relationship between the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and its satellite Young REP group situated in Small Heath School, Small Heath Birmingham, an area where the majority of the residents are of Pakistani and Muslim heritage. Paying particular attention to ethnicity, I will consider the effect of the specific dynamics of this community [local and diasporic] on the aesthetic and ethical decisions made by The REP

about the youth theatre group. Through an examination of space and place I will investigate the way that the youth theatre participants relate to the theatre both with and without a building. I will also consider how the group identity is affected by their attachment to a school, and whether the presence of The REP in the school opens up a liminal space. Throughout this case study I will reflect on how ethnicity contributes to the geographical and cultural (capital) barriers to attending the theatre.

### **Identity Descriptors**

**Natalie Hart**, I am a 31 year old white female with Celtic heritage and working class roots, drama facilitator and PhD researcher.

#### Small Heath Young REP

**Naveed**, British Pakistani, Age 15, Male, Loves Drama

**Salima**, 14 years old. I am British Pakistani and I have a working class background. I am from Birmingham. I go to Small Heath School and I am a member of Young REP

**Aisha**, 14 year old student in Small Heath School. I come from Asian heritage but I was born in Britain. I have a lot of enthusiasm for drama and acting. I love meeting new people and making new friends. I come from a working class background

**Yacoub**, Age 15, Persian/Iranian/Pakistani, Working Class Family, Male, Go to school – studying science, Into Heavy Metal Music, Love drama, acting and performing

**Zahid**, I'm from a Pakistani British family, I'm working class roots and I'm a student at Small Heath School

#### The REP staff

**Steve Ball**, I am a 52 year old white urban theatre professional gay father

**Hannah Phillips**, 33 year old Queer female with Jewish heritage. Theatre maker, lecturer and facilitator

**Rhys McClelland** , 33 year old white male with Celtic heritage and working class roots, youth theatre director and passionate learner

**Associate Producer (BAMETI)**, I am a 30 year old Welsh, mixed race female to a black Jamaican father and white, Welsh mother, heterosexual, university graduate with working class roots who has a senior management role in theatre.

### **The significance of ethnicity and the arts**

As I discussed in the Context section, diversity in the arts has a complex history. Ethnicity can effect what cultural preferences (and capital) are passed down, and research has shown that people who are Asian or British Asian predominantly attend performances that are specific to their own culture, often not returning to the site of these productions to see other performances which they perceive as not directly relating to them (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p37; from ACE, 2003b in Belfiore & Bennett, 2007, p252; Sierz, 2011, p239).

Therefore, if an organisation does not offer diverse product it automatically limits the diversity of its audience demographic. This in turn perpetuates non-attendance, as Clare Cochrane notes with regard to the Birmingham REP, “[...]for a lot of Black and Asian people in Birmingham going into the main house was difficult if your audience is predominantly white” (Interview 15.02.2008). As well as demographics of audiences, programming which merely comes from a white, European model fails to address existing cultural imperialism, and as Bharucha highlights above, in a post-colonial, globalised, multicultural society, this is inadequate (Pannayiotou in Appignanesi, 2010; Bharucha, 2000, p159).

As I also examined in the context section, diversity is one of The REP’s key objectives, and it works hard to offer a diverse programme of work. However, the (now former) Associate Producer (Black and Minority Ethnic Theatre Initiative (BAMETI)) noted that due to the

wide range of cultures, ages and backgrounds in Birmingham and the surrounding regions, this is about offering certain types of work consistently rather than frequently, for example being known to have a Christmas show every year that is accessible to a very wide range of people and producing a new piece of work to take on tour in the early part of the year.

Complementing the Arts Council's drive to embed diversity into cultural organisations as the life blood of creativity rather than a separate component, this work involves a diversity of form, content and approach alongside a willingness to work outside of normal theatre traditions (ArtsCouncil, 2011, p7 and p15). From early attempts to represent Birmingham's Asian communities in *Up Spaghetti Junction* in 1973, via the controversial *Bezhti* in 2004, recent successful REP productions which have diversity at their core included *These Four Streets* (2009) and *8sixteen32* (2008), a piece by the Decypher Collective incorporating the spoken word and Grime music (Sierz, 2011, p60). The success of these pieces is in part due to the collaborative way that the theatre has engaged with new writers. Two years in development, *8sixteen32* involved MC's, a hip hop poet and a broken beats jazzman<sup>25</sup>, and thus approached Grime music as a culture and a way of life (Interview with Associate Producer BAMETI). *These Four Streets* was written by six young female writers, inspired by their own meetings and interviews with dozens of local people.<sup>26</sup>

The REP's commitment to diverse programming and tailored marketing techniques means that the (now former) Community Engagement Officer saw cultural diversity as a less important factor of her engagement work, highlighting social class as being more significant. Although she also noted that lower socio-economic status and ethnicity were often interlinked (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p37). Of course grouping all non-white citizens into the box of 'other' misses the complexities of individual identities and the variety of factors at work in accessing a cultural institution such as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/news/mhygfhy/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/event/these-four-streets/>

Taking South Asian background as an example, the Community Engagement Officer does not homogenise and breaks this down:

“It will make a difference whether they’re first generation or third generation. It will make a difference whether they’re Muslim or Hindu. It will make a difference whether they live in Sparkbrook or Moseley. It will make a difference whether they are university educated or not, it will make a difference whether they’re working class or middle class. All of those things will have an impact”.

These issues are also relevant when considering how young people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds engage with the youth theatre provision of the Birmingham REP. The Learning and Participation (L&P) department was conscious that the Young REP was not representative of Birmingham in terms of class or cultural diversity, and worked hard to rectify this. This was in part due to the previous use of a waiting list which inadvertently privileged white, middle class children whose parents were theatre goers and had the confidence to enquire about provision and then put their children’s names down (in some cases years before they were old enough to attend). The waiting list is an example of cultural capital being handed down from parent to child, influencing whether theatre is part of their cultural inheritance (Jackson, 2010, p25-26). Another significant factor in the way young people will relate to The REP is the relationship that these young people have with the city of Birmingham and how they navigate it, and this will be effected by where they live and by their ethnicity, as I will explore below.

## **Group Identity**

### ***Origins of Small Heath Young REP***

Small Heath Young REP was set up in 2003 when Steve Ball, as part of a strategy to broaden the demographic of the youth theatre, approached the (now former) Head of Drama at Small Heath School. The Creative Arts Teacher, Samantha Hughes (who was the main point

of contact for The REP during my field work), remembers the origins of the group well and with obvious fondness. Recounting that there had been some resistance to school performances before the Young REP arrived, she attributed this to parents' cultural attitudes both towards theatre and to staying behind after school (particularly for girls). They therefore decided to start by just offering the Young REP to 6<sup>th</sup> form students. The policy of setting it apart from an afterschool club as a professionally run youth theatre meant that they succeeded in gaining a group of interested participants meeting on Saturdays, culminating in a performance of *Hard to Swallow*. The particular success story of one pupil, who turned around her behaviour during the project, established it as something the school were keen to continue with. It was then offered to all age groups, and quickly became populated by a younger cohort (possibly due to exam pressures further up the school). After trying several different performances in the second year, the annual pantomime became firmly established. The group has had five youth theatre directors over the seven years, and Rhys McClelland had just taken over the group when I began my field work. He was keen to move the group away from pantomime and to try something new.

As The REP can no longer staff Small Heath Young REP on a Saturday (due to other Young REP commitments) the group now convenes on Wednesday after school between 4pm and 6pm. They meet in the school drama studio - a large hall with a simple stage at one end. It has no windows, is generally accessed by a short set of stairs, and has chairs and tables stacked up around the edges with some basic lighting/sound equipment. Some of the young people go home to change their clothes before the rehearsal while others remain in school uniform (Field journal).



### ***Small Heath School***

Small Heath School is a co-educational state school which has 1328 pupils aged 11-19. It has gained outstanding in its last two Ofsted reports, and Ofsted summarises it as an oversubscribed school where most pupils live in walking distance; there is a very high proportion eligible for free school meals; most students with SEN or disabilities have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties; there are less girls than boys and the majority of students are from Pakistani heritage. It has won many awards including Raising Attainment and Pupil Progress mentor status in 2008, due to the school's work in raising students' achievement (Ofsted Report 354337 6-7 July 2010). It is a bright, clean school with interesting displays about art and charity and welcoming seating areas for students to sit in during breaks (Field notes).

### ***Small Heath***

The school resides in the area of Small Heath, located in the Eastern Corridor of Birmingham which is home to the majority of Birmingham's Pakistani population (Cole & Ferrari, 2008, p65 and 68). In many ways Small Heath is the quintessential diasporic community (Hesse, 2000, p11). It is a living, breathing example of the migratory outcome of globalisation (Castles and Miller 1993 in Kymlicka, 2001, p275-276). The demographic make-up of the area is the embodiment of multiculturalism, both as an outcome of political accommodation of migrants from outside the West (Modood, 2007, p2) and as the lived experience of diversity where multiculturalism is the "[...] description of the character of our society" (Livingstone, 2011, p29). Small Heath is fairly typical of the way in which the ethnic composition of Birmingham has organised itself: although Birmingham is overall a diverse city, many areas are relatively ethnically mono-cultural (though no more segregated than other similar cities) (Cole & Ferrari, 2008, p65). In the case of areas such as Small Heath, this is not (I discussed in the multiculturalism section) as some would claim due to a lack of desire by Asian residents to mix with non-Asian residents. Rather, as Bains,

quoted by Cole and Ferrari, notes (specifically about the dense population of Asian residents in Small Heath), “[...]the primary reason is that some of these traditional white areas are perceived as hostile and have a reputation for organised racist activities” (Bains, 2006, p35 in Cole & Ferrari, 2008, p70). This fear of racism from residents of other areas has direct implications for how the young people of Small Heath relate to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and I will explore this in more detail below.

The term community, as I discussed in the literature review, must be used with some caution, as it can be applied as a way to patronise and/or confine minoritised people (Baumann, 1996, p29-30; Brah, 1996, p100). It is also important to recognise that, although often designated as such externally, no culture is internally homogenous. Therefore, although many residents of Small Heath will identify as being Muslim and of Pakistani Heritage, there will be a great degree of internal variety within these classifications (Benhabib, 2002, p61). However, taking this into account, for many people a community attached to a sense of place, founded on shared language, experiences, kinship and physical space is as real as it is imagined, and Samantha Hughes describes it as “[...] very close knit, everybody really does know each other around here”. I interviewed five young people from the Small Heath Young REP group, and this feeling is echoed by them - Aisha said when asked to describe the local community, “loads of people know each other”. This impression of a sociable community also came through in questionnaire responses, as when surveyed, 13 out of 17 of the Small Heath Young REP participants agreed or strongly agreed that ‘My local community is friendly’, with one missing response, two neither agreeing nor disagreeing and only one strongly disagreeing (See appendix 5). It is highly plausible that this one ‘strongly disagree’ response belongs to Zahid who goes to school in Small Heath but lives in Bordesley Green.

It is important not to generalise with any community, even if self-identified. As I explored in the section on community, belonging is complex and the sense of belonging that a community can offer to some is often at the expense of others (Delanty, 2010, p6). One of the male participants that I interviewed, Zahid, whilst agreeing that Small Heath is convivial, also highlights the complexity of this amiability,

“If you’ve been around Small Heath and lived in Small Heath all your life it’s really friendly, but if you come as an outsider... You’ll just see two people walking out of different shops coming to each other, see each other on the street and talk to each other and stuff. But like if you just come to Small Heath even from just like Bordesley Green or something and you haven’t really come to Small Heath for your whole life, then you don’t really know anyone and then you’d find it weird that everyone knows each other.”

Zahid astutely noted the fine lines that exist between belonging and not belonging, and of being an insider or an outsider (Delanty, 2010, p6). When surveyed, 11 out of 17 participants felt part of their local community, with 3 being unsure and 2 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (see appendix 5.). Therefore it is evident that, although Small Heath offers a sense of belonging to some, this is not the case for all. It is worth noting that although the majority of students at the school do live in walking distance to the school, so are likely to live in Small Heath, I did not specify in the question that ‘my community’ was Small Heath, so some of the young people who answered negatively may live elsewhere.

The spatial dynamics of a large city like Birmingham are complicated - as Massey (2005) notes, “They [Cities] are peculiarly large, intense and heterogeneous constellations of trajectories, demanding complex negotiations” (p155). These complexities can have a profound impact on the movements of people within cities, and thus the places that they are likely to access. Zahid offers an interesting insight into the variety of negotiations

needed, even within a small area. Bordesley Green and Small Heath border onto one another, yet Zahid highlighted that Bordesley Green is different in ethnic composition to Small Heath: “In Small Heath it’s predominantly Asian as well, in Bordesley Green there’s more of a mix”. He goes on to hesitantly note the racial tensions that he experiences in Bordesley Green because of this mix of ethnicities: “I do talk to white people and a few Asian people in Bordesley Green and they are friendly and stuff but when you see like the odd people in the street then you see the tension when they walk past each other sometimes”. Later in the interview, Zahid and a female participant Salima bicker about *how* Asian Bordesley Green is. With Salima stating her Grandmother lives there and “[...] her road’s all Asian”, wherein Zahid defensively challenges her statement because she doesn’t live there and he does; Bordesley Green isn’t just one road, and that his road, “it’s like half or two thirds and a third it’s not mainly Asian. (*Quieter*) I have a lot of white people on my road”.

Zahid’s encounters embody part of the lived experience of diversity and complexities of spatial relationships in a city. As Low and Lawrence-Zuniga (2003) state, “urban environments provide frequent opportunities for spatial contests because of their complex structures and differential social entities that collude and compete for control over material and symbolic resources” (p19). It also echoes experiences described by bell hooks (2009) where fear of racist abuse in her youth led her to a degree of self -enclosure in a black neighbourhood where she felt safe (p70). This fear in part explains why those from BAME backgrounds in the Eastern Corridor are more likely to stay in the area in which they are born or first reside (Cole & Ferrari, 2008, p72). Keeping close to other people with similar religious and cultural beliefs provides a support system, including shops selling particular produce and culturally relevant community resources (Anwar, 1998, p81). This geographical closeness founded on similarities in turn contributes to a stronger feeling of community, safety and an enhanced feeling of belonging (Delanty, 2010, px; Bauman, 2001,

p112). Samantha Hughes noted that the intense feeling of belonging within Small Heath was not typical of the rest of Birmingham: “[...]we’ve got year 8 lads walking down the street like they are king of the area and I say to them, not every area of Birmingham is like this, put you in the middle of, just down the road, and you might not act so confident”. A feeling of safety in their local geographical area and a more uncertain terrain beyond that area impacts upon the relationship that residents of Small Heath have with the rest of Birmingham, and has direct implications for their relationship to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre which is located in a very different part of the city.

### ***Islam***

The majority of the children who attend the school, and indeed the residents of the local area, class themselves as Muslim. In a post 9/11 and 7/7 Britain Muslims in general, and specifically Muslim youth, are increasingly positioned as troublesome and dangerous and under pressure to respond to accusations of terrorism (Bayat & Herrera, 2010, p22; Moss and O’Loughlin, 2008 in Gillespie & O’Loughlin, 2009, p97). A general ‘Muslimification’ of anyone of Asian appearance, a stereotyping of Muslim youth as radical, violent extremists and an increasing prevalence and acceptance of Muslimophobic positions complicates the lives of young people growing up Asian and/or Muslim in Britain today (Gillespie & O’Loughlin, 2009, p97; Bayat & Herrera, 2010, p4-5; Swedenburg, 2010, p299). In the context of this research, the young people’s identity of Muslim youth had an impact on the ethical and aesthetic decisions made by their youth theatre directors. It also affected the relationship between the young people and the theatre building due to the complex interplay of religion, space and accessibility.

Generalisations and homogenisations of the category Muslim are as problematic as generalisations about the category Youth (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p7). However, there is

something salient about considering the relevance of both of these categories, as Bayat and Herrera (2010) state:

“Muslim youth have as much in common with their non-Muslim global counterparts as they share among themselves. While there exist many lines of demarcation within the category of ‘Muslim youth’ along lines of class, gender, education, and cultural divides, to name a few, there are also certain common attributes that make the category of ‘Muslim youth’ meaningful” (p5).

Events of the last decade, as discussed above, have drawn attention to those classed as Muslim youth and affected their experience of the world, making it a valid area for consideration (Bayat & Herrera, 2010, p362).

As a result of Britain’s post-World War II policies of importing labour from colonies and ex-colonies, there are 1.6 million Muslims living in Britain today, mostly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, and they are the most economically marginal of all minoritised ethnic groups in the UK (Swedenburg, 2010, p292). Islam is often painted by the British media as backwards, old fashioned, fixed and unchanging (Richards, 2011, p89). Muslim youth, as noted above, are frequently depicted as religious fundamentalists and dangerous.

However, the importance of religion in young people’s identities varies. For example, research has shown that religion is an important factor for Muslim youth as a major component of ethnic identity and as a tool for public participation - however, it can also be regarded as a restrictive force, especially when stigmatised or seen as definitive (Anwar, 1998, p188; Semi *et al.*, 2009, p76). Interestingly, although all of the *Small Heath* descriptors included ethnic origin (mainly Pakistani), none of the five participants that I interviewed included religion in their descriptors of themselves. This may have been because I did not include religion in my own which I used as an example (I am an Atheist, but did not include this in my descriptor), as across the board only one person I asked to

write descriptors included religion. It could also mean that they either do not regard it as particularly significant, or conversely that it is so significant and central to their identity it becomes invisible to them. I cannot be sure which if these would be true for the participants I interviewed, or if they would each have a different reason. However, whatever their personal consideration, they are living in an area which is demographically majority Muslim and thus highly likely to in some way connect to a Muslim identity.

The fact that Islam encourages a religious-political un-boundaried nation of Muslims , Ummah (Modood *et al.*, 2006a, p46), positions Muslims as part of a nation which is “‘global’ and ‘singular’, existing everywhere and nowhere” (Shavit, 2009, p101). In many ways this makes it the quintessential identity for a post-modern, globalised world (Hesse, 2000, p20; Held, 2002, p57-58). The young people surveyed were globally connected, with 16 out of 17 respondents having family living in other parts of the world (with one response missing), 12 used the internet to contact people in other parts of the world and five had lived in a country other than Britain. Due to the diasporic nature of their global awareness, this connection was often through visiting Pakistan or Bangladesh and, specifically, the area where they have family living (Brazier & Mannur, 2003, p3). Samantha Hughes noted that in recent years the school had children joining them from Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and parts of Africa, and they are bringing with them knowledge of these other parts of the world as well.

### ***Small Heath Young REP Identity***

The number of participants in the Small Heath Young REP ranged from about 15 to 22, and of the 17 who completed questionnaires seven were boys and ten were girls. There was a general consistency of attendance, with nine participants having attended for more than two years, two having attended for over four years and only three for less than six months. Their ages ranged from 11-17, with ten in the 11-14 age range and seven in the 15-17 age

range. When asked to choose an ethnicity from a selection of tick boxes, 11 selected Pakistani, 1 Indian, 2 Black African and 2 any other mixed background, with one response missing.

Samantha Hughes considered that the *Small Heath Young REP* participants were representative of the school as a whole - of mixed abilities, living ½ mile and 1 mile radius from the school. This correlates with the Ofsted description of the schools intake, and she describes them as “a typical Small Heath bunch”. However she also notes that they do tend to be from “[...]more lenient families, so they represent, maybe parents more educated, maybe parents born here”. She describes a mixture of attitudes to theatre from parents, ranging from a Mosque leader in full support of his son’s participation to parents who do not support after school activities, mixed gender events or emotional expression. Demonstrating the diversity within what is often seen as a homogenous culture from the outside (Delanty, 2010, p84), she notes, “I was told when I started here about nine years ago that the parents in the area are becoming more and more lenient, but for ever lenient parent you have you also have one whose just as strict as ever, just as traditional as ever”. Describing how sad it can be to see young people miss out who would love to participate, she expresses frustration, but ultimately respects parental decisions. Samantha Hughes also notes that there are parents who change their minds when they see a performance, and of a strong support for the productions from the governors.

The participants I interviewed gave a range of reasons for attending, including: the other participants; enjoyment; the feeling elicited from a performance and the experience gained. This chimes with Hughes and Wilson’s (2004) extensive youth theatre research which found that:

“80% of young people said they attended youth theatre to improve their acting skills or pursue an interest in acting and the theatre; 54% said they attended youth



theatre to meet up with friends; and 51 % said they attended youth theatre to work towards productions”(p67).

Several participants had joined due to word of mouth, as Yacoub describes in his interview:

“I heard lots about it. There was like loads of people talking about it”. Zahid had joined after seeing his sister perform in one of the productions and Aisha had seen posters around the school.

Their youth theatre director, Rhys, described them in his end of field work interview as “[...] a very talented, passionate, skilled, enthusiastic group of young people”, but also questioned the strength of their identity as a Young REP group. He recognised the commitment of the school to the group and the successes of previous productions, but asked in his initial interview “[...] are they a Young REP company?”. The (now former) Director of Young People’s Theatre at The REP Hannah Phillips also questioned how clearly the *Small Heath Young REP* saw itself as a Young REP group:

“[...] their identities are so strong because it’s coming from school identities.

You’ve got a group of young people from a school together and what they become is their school group and that’s already there and the only way that changes is by bringing them into another space”.

In order to explore the group’s identity, at the start of one of their rehearsals I gave out blank postcards and some pens and asked them to create postcards to tell people about their Young REP group. I drew this exercise from the work of Noel Grieg (2008) on the project *Connecting the World*, who suggested it as part of a group of activities designed to encourage individual voices, provide a clear and imaginative framework and encourage contemplation about how we represent ourselves (p27). It was also part of my commitment to avoid having just verbal or written engagements with the young people, as

this incited a wider range of expression and avoided excluding those who were less confident with literacy or speech (Bragg, 2010, p47).

There were 21 postcards returned to me, and there was no general group image or branding present on the postcards. The identity of the group was very disparate, as ten of the postcards had the school name on them, six had the school logo, six had the words Young REP and five just the word REP. However, there was an overall theme of positivity, friendliness, happiness and pride - six included drawings of smiling faces, six had images of hands holding each other, eleven had friendly or excited words such as fun, enjoyable, brilliant, generous, kind, diversity, social and trust. Nine included theatre related words or images, and the rest were more focused on the enjoyment and co-operative aspects of their group.



(Photograph above - *Small Heath Young REP* postcards)

The strong presence of the school logo and school name correlates with Hannah Phillips's assertion that the group's identity is strongly school associated, and this has some implications for those who might wish to attend a youth theatre to have friends outside of their usual peer group, which is seen by many participants of youth theatre to assist with

self-expression (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p65). It also has implication as to how much they feel part of a Young REP community rather than an after school drama club.

### **Performance Choices**

The aesthetic and ethical decisions that The REP made regarding the performance choices for Small Heath Young REP were affected in a variety of ways by the ethnicity of the group. Often these effects were not immediately obvious but became more apparent through the process of my field work. For example, the choice to produce pantomimes for several years was influenced by the ethnicity of the group, although this might at first glance seem to be contradictory.

### ***Pantomime***

Prior to the commencement of my main field work, *Small Heath Young REP* had developed a tradition of producing pantomimes. I had been to one of these performances when I worked with the Young REP in a freelance capacity, and I had seen one performance and some rehearsals in year one of my PhD as part of preliminary field work.

Pantomime was not a tradition that naturally sprang from the local community or the Young REP participants. As Samantha Hughes notes, “[...] things like the pantomime tradition they often find really hard to relate to at first because they have no concept of it and are like ‘what’s this cross dressing?’”. I had observed this myself when watching the group perform *Jack and the Beanstalk* (29.02.2008), and noted that some of the younger boys (approximately year 7) in the audience found the 'rules' of pantomime hard to negotiate - calling out other than the accepted canon and getting shushed by teachers (Field Notes) . In rehearsals I attended for *Cinderella* in 2008 (written by their then youth theatre director) the young people did not understand a lot of the jokes, and needed to have them explained to them. However, Samantha Hughes noted that for many of the

young people, a school visit to the Hippodrome's pantomime in Year 6 would have been the only theatre experience that any of them would have had when they joined the school.

The majority of the pantomimes were not written for the group specifically but were written by a friend of the former youth theatre director, who would alter regional jokes to include local football teams and teachers. However, Samantha Hughes remembered that the writer was conscious that when the group took on his work, it was the first time it had been performed by an Asian cast. From my own experience of viewing these pantomimes in the past, there were sometimes jokes which felt uncomfortable considering the context, for example the character of a Harp which played *Land of Hope and Glory* and *Rule Britannia* which elicited hostile groans from the mainly Asian audience. There was also a joke which stated 'I'm an Englishman, so I'm alright on two counts', which I interpreted to mean that his status as English and male gave him two reasons to feel positive about his position in the world. This seemed to chime with the idea expressed by Garner (2007) that, "When people are talking about hierarchies of entitlement and justice, they set up a scenario in which nationality generates entitlement, and when it comes down to it, colour is the privileged sign of nationality: whiteness is a kind of flag"(p151). Although the statement was made within the context of a comic production, and thus was in all likelihood meant ironically, this was not obvious, and risked merely enforcing existing inequalities around concepts of nationality, ethnicity and status.

However, the appeal of pantomime for Samantha Hughes came from the playful element that it offered, and the fact that it avoided serious issues which she worried might be controversial due to the religious and cultural beliefs of the local community. As she explained to me during her interview, "Panto has that fun element where anything goes anyway but I think if there was a play that dealt with sensitive issues it maybe wouldn't go down as well".

It also provided the young people with something of a safety net in terms of their own performance skills; as Zahid and Yacoub discussed, if you make a mistake in a pantomime the conventions allow you to cover it up:

Zahid:               It's like a fail-safe in pantomime

Yacoub :            More things to go wrong, I mean in a serious play. Because you mess up in a pantomime then it doesn't make that big of a difference.

### ***Beyond Pantomime***

The young people and the audience (parents, teachers, Governors) had embraced the pantomime - performing annually in the school drama studio, incorporating a buffet into the first night and being attended by local dignitaries such as the mayor. However, Rhys McClelland and Samantha Hughes were both keen to try something different with the group. Rhys McClelland felt that Pantomime didn't challenge the young people enough in terms of performance skills, and that it contributed to the group feeling dislocated from the rest of the Young REP (who were not doing Pantomimes). The strong tradition of performing at school to a local audience, he felt, also kept them from truly connecting to the theatre.

Rhys McClelland commented to me that the group had initially shown some hesitancy to change, and he was concerned that due to having mainly experienced pantomime their performance skills were fairly limited. However, despite some initial reluctance, they were able to reflect on the benefits of moving away from this form, as Zahid noted in the group interview, "I think it worked well but eventually it was going to get boring and you can't always have pantomimes. It's fun whilst you're doing it but it's nice to get away and do something else".

## ***Shakespeare***

Initially Rhys McClelland had brought the group his idea of *Macbeth* for their non-pantomime production, because he was keen to present them similar opportunities that had been offered to the central groups. The importance of offering classical texts to young people of all backgrounds is supported by highly esteemed institutions such as the Globe, who are keen to encourage young people to regard access to Shakespeare “[...] as part of their cultural entitlement” (Fiona Banks, Head of Education The Globe cited by Nicholson, 2011, p140). It is also championed by prominent Drama and Theatre Education (D&TE) theorists and practitioners. This is because using a Shakespearian text offers the young people access to cultural capital which they may not otherwise have had access to, as I discussed in the section on class (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7; Bennett, 2009, p259). Theorist and drama practitioner Jonathan Neelands chooses texts from the classical canon, due to his cultural democratic principle that “[...] great literature belongs to everyone” (Neelands & O'Connor, 2010, p2). Giving this sense of entitlement to all young people, regardless of background, is important because as Nicholson (2011) notes about a project with young people in Southall, London, “They saw Shakespeare representing a culture that was not theirs but in the words of one of the boys ‘will stay white if we don’t learn it’” (p143).

Although the pantomime tradition was somewhat alien to the participants, their audience had over the years developed a greater understanding of the form and a degree of ownership over it. The participants demonstrated considerable insight that their audience will have developed certain performance expectations through viewing these pantomimes, and were concerned that a deviation from this could be detrimental to their enjoyment, as Bennett (1997) notes:

“A crucial aspect of audience involvement, then, is the degree to which a performance is accessible through the codes audiences are accustomed to utilizing, the conventions they are used to recognizing, at a theatrical event. Intelligibility and/or success of a particular performance will undoubtedly be determined on this basis”(p104).

Therefore, concerned that the audience would not relate to Rhys McClelland’s suggestion of *Macbeth*, they decided on a middle ground, which was to produce *Dream Nights*, a tongue in cheek version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It immediately challenged their performance skills, as Zahid noted when discussing the difference between Shakespeare and Pantomime: “[...] it’s really over the top and you can make mistakes and stuff, and Shakespeare if you miss a line in this one and you’re telling a joke then you’re just going to lose the joke aren’t you?”.

The production of *Dream Nights* was seen as a success by all concerned. There were a large number of people in the audience and I noticed the high energy of the performance, which was also commented upon by Samantha Hughes and Rhys McClelland. The head teacher on the first night declared: “Shakespeare comes to Small Heath!”, which could be seen as his recognition of the cultural capital that Shakespeare has. Rhys McClelland told me in his end of field work interview that he saw the performance as the year’s defining moment for the *Small Heath Young REP*, because they had proved to themselves that they could move away from pantomime. When asked to reflect on the entire process, the young people recognised the challenge of the process but ultimately the success and enjoyment of the performance, which is congruent with Hughes and Wilson’s(2004) definition of effective youth theatre as offering a safe context to take risks, high expectations, real deadlines and the opportunity to perform (p62).

Crucially, Rhys McClelland saw the success of the performance as giving the group the chance to develop, “[...] just opening the door for them a jar and they’ve kind of kicked it down and run through it. So that feels very positive and opens us up to do some interesting work next year.” The work planned for the following year included National Theatre Connections and Shakespeare’s School Festival to offer them higher profile platforms - whilst recognising the value of performing at school, Rhys McClelland felt it limited them: “[...] I think it holds the young people back, I think it gives them low expectations of what they can actually achieve if actually all they are asked for is a two night performance for the governors.”.

Rhys McClelland regarded the choice to keep *Small Heath* in the pattern of producing pantomimes at the school as a safe option, predicated to a large extent on fear. By keeping within the pantomime context it meant that the youth theatre directors and the staff at the school could avoid asking questions around appropriateness of content, form, costume or dialogue. As bell hooks (1994) has asserted, “The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained” (p39). Fear of incidents like *Bezhti* (as discussed earlier), and a desire to be respectful of people’s beliefs, meant that Rhys McClelland felt he was perhaps over cautious and made assumptions:

“[...] so I think safety is a big thing, that immediately you go, like *Dream Nights* as I say, it has a couple of bits in there that immediately I’ve gone ‘that joke won’t go down well’, now I don’t know that, I don’t know anything about the families that these young people come from, but my assumption with them coming in as people of faith, people in a community that’s quite disciplined, my assumption is that we



need to get rid of that joke because it's not going to go down well and I don't know that that's true".

He calls instead for more dialogue where these queries and concerns can be aired with the young people, parents and members of the community (hooks, 1994, p130).

### ***Valuing diversity***

There is always a tension between giving young people access to the culture of power and not devaluing their cultural background. Diversity in the arts has a complicated past, as I discussed in the section on ethnicity, race and identity. Although Nazeem Khan (Khan *et al.*, 1976), noticing a marginalisation of the culture of minoritised ethnicities, argued strongly for funding for specific 'ethnic arts' in the 1970's, the 2010 *Third Text* Arts Council report has highlighted the ghettoization that many Black and Asian artists feel (Appignanesi; Bharucha, 2000, p41). The main complaint from artists is that they believe they are only engaged with on the basis of the colour of their skin. By only being offered projects which reflect their cultural background, artists find that their creative choices are thus very limited (MORRIS *et al.*, 2005; Appignanesi, 2010). This was something that Samantha Hughes felt was true of the young people at *Small Heath*: "[...] they don't want to just do a Bollywood drama, they want to look outside their culture".

However, only offering young people white, middle class texts from the culture of power also has implications. Drama theorist/practitioner Christine Hatton (2003) notes that her own experience of teaching students from immigrant backgrounds opened up important questions:

“[...] whose stories have been denied or bypassed in classroom dramas or in secondary education? Whose realm of experience is worthy of dramatic investigation? Where do teachers allow the journeys of drama to travel?” (p146).

The significance of this is that, as educational theorist Sonia Nieto discusses, because certain (dominant) cultural forms are overvalued in educative settings (and beyond), young people learn that alternative cultural backgrounds are not as important or valuable (Nieto, 1999, p46). This can lead to what Boateng refers to as *deculturalization*, where students learn to see their own culture as inferior and that it should not be visible in a school context (Nieto, 1999, p34). Nieto (1999) draws on a range of scholars who suggest that a validation by teachers of cultural symbols from different ethnic backgrounds can have very positive effects on learning (p16).

Acknowledgement and incorporation of diversity is seen by D&TE theorists/practitioners Neelands and O'Connor (2010) as essential: “Educational drama seeks to evolve a practice that reflects the forms, traditions, values and spiritualities of the globalised, multicultural societies that exist in most western countries” (p91). This is not just the case for D&TE, and acknowledging a variety of cultural forms and engaging with people from diverse backgrounds has been a key component of Arts Council funding requirements for subsidised repertory theatres since the 1984 *Glory of the Garden* report (Merkin, 2010, p70). However, as discussed in the context section, the way in which this has been approached has changed considerably over the years. The Arts Council’s *Creative Case* set out in 2011 argues that diversity is crucial for true creativity to flourish and in the (now former) Associate Producer’s (BAMETI) view the key to embedding diversity into an organisation is by getting everyone to see this diversity as the lifeblood of theatre. The relationship between content, artists and audience means that true diversity emerges through an innovative approach to form and content:

“[...] theatrically stories that we are telling and the way that we are telling them and I guess the end point of that is we may be affecting the diversity of the people that are interested in coming to see those stories. And those stories might be better told or presented if they are presented by a particular type of person or in a particular way” (Now former Associate Producer BAMETI).

The understanding by the young people that there is a correlation between form, content and audience response was demonstrated when a few years ago, alongside the yearly pantomime, they also chose to re-write a play called *Messed Up*. Theatre scholar Susan Bennett (1997) notes, “Within cultural boundaries, there are, then obviously different viewing publics” (p94). *Small Heath Young REP* performed in their school for an audience of mainly parents and governors, and therefore people from the local (mainly Asian) community. The young people saw that that audience might not immediately relate to a play about a totally white community, and so in a desire to make it more relevant for their audience they chose to, in their own words, ‘curryfy’ it. This involved them, whilst trying to avoid stereotypical Asian or Bollywood tropes, changing characters and plotlines, for example, from a teenager running away due to pregnancy, to a teenager avoiding an arranged marriage (Samantha Hughes Interview 24.11.2010). Zahid remembers this project and explained their choices:

“There were a few jokes in it but we changed all the jokes and how the family was, like it was a typical white family, and we changed it so it was mixed and there were like Asian people and stuff in there. To fit in more with the area so when people came to see it they could empathise more with it”.

Where the impetus to approach the text from this perspective came from I do not know, but Zahid and Samantha Hughes were both very positive about the experience when discussing it.

Following on from their experience of *Dream Nights* (Performance 19th May 2011), the young people were keen to try out a variety of performance styles and forms, perhaps simply out of creative curiosity and the realisation that creativity flourishes with diversity. Zahid noted, “[...] we did pantomime for such a long time at this school because it worked, because people liked it. I’d want to do different work but I’d like lots of comedy.” and Yacoub suggested “Do something new every time, keep it fresh”.

## **Relationship to Birmingham Repertory Theatre**

### ***With a Building***

As I have discussed above, Steve Ball established the group within the school to make the Young REP more accessible to the young people living in Small Heath. However, as a consequence of meeting in their school rather than at the theatre, the relationship between *Small Heath Young REP* and the theatre building itself was not particularly strong. Steve Ball, Hannah Phillips, Rhys McClelland, Samantha Hughes and the young people all expressed a desire to improve it. Hannah Phillips identified that, “I don’t feel that they always really feel that they are engaged with The REP, and not just as a building, but I think that’s really important as well”. She also questioned that unless they were engaged with the theatre as a building and an organisation, what makes it different from an afterschool club? Steve Ball was also concerned. He said, “I’m not convinced that the young people in the satellites feel that they belong in any way to the Birmingham REP. I think they feel they are doing an activity they really enjoy in their own school settings, but they don’t feel joined up”, and he regarded strengthening this connection as crucial. Samantha Hughes felt that the young people of Small Heath did not have a strong history of attending The REP theatre. “I reckon some of the families will have never been, a lot of them go to the pantomime when they’re in Year 6, at the Hippodrome or somewhere, but a lot of them

won't have been to The REP". Rhys McClelland in his initial interview felt that the group wasn't integrated with the rest of the Young REP and the theatre, and that "we're trying to kind of pull them into the fold".

### **Accessibility**

The Rep had established *Small Heath Young REP* as a way of circumventing barriers and bringing the theatre to the young people of Small Heath. However although the theatre had come to Small Heath, *Small Heath* had rarely come to the theatre. Small Heath's lack of access to the theatre building in the past had been in part due to habit, because as discussed earlier the pantomime at the school had become a successful fixture on the school calendar (Samantha Hughes Interview 24.11.2010), and so there was no real impetus to offer them performance space at The REP. However, Rhys McClelland also felt that it was based in part on cultural assumptions from The REP that there would be resistance from parents to taking the young people out of the familiar school environment and into the centre of Birmingham. He considered that there was a real need for dialogue to ascertain whether this would actually be a problem.

This is a complex issue and I had witnessed myself how, when talking to the parents of two participants on the phone (to gain permission for them to partake in my research workshop), they had been happy for them to take part as long as it was at and with school. There are also some practical issues to attend to, for example Aisha and Naveed both identified that a barrier to attending a group that met at the theatre was the distance to The REP, as they would need parents to accompany them into the city centre. As Horton notes (2011) , "[...] limited independent mobility is a major logistical barrier to accessing services or opportunities [...]"(p46). Lack of independent mobility is in part affected by culture, as Samantha Hughes noted, "Because a lot of them maybe aren't permitted to go very far out of the area, even socially with their friends at weekends etc.". This limited

mobility was echoed by the contact teacher at a school where a Young REP group had been based from 2006 to 2009 (that I had facilitated for its first 18 months). The school is in an area which also has a large Muslim Asian population and the teacher told me in an Interview in 2011 that she doubted the young people would have engaged with the theatre without the Young REP being brought to them. A key reason was accessing the city centre. The teacher explained, "Lots of children haven't even been into the city centre, they tend to just really stay in Alum Rock". She explained that after school it would be difficult as many of them attend Mosque, and at the weekend transport would be a factor:

"On a Saturday, really the travelling into Birmingham, lots of parents when they go on work experience they take them to their work experience [in Birmingham city centre], they pick them up from their work experience [...] the distance isn't far really. But lots of parents are not happy for them to have that independence."

This means that the young people are reliant on parents being keen enough for them to take part to drive them into the city centre. In turn this suggests that socioeconomics also play a part; as Leverett (2011) notes, transporting children costs money that parents may not have (p16).

Young people in urban contexts are highly likely to have very localised identities, and the young people of Small Heath, as discussed above, had demonstrated this. This localised identity, coupled with the fear of racist assault, also discussed earlier, can for some young people lead to an anxiety about moving beyond their familiar spaces and of having to meet new people (Gidley, 2007, p150; hooks, 2009, p70). Samantha Hughes had told me that the young people at Small Heath thought other children who did theatre were white grammar school children, and Aisha was worried that if she attended the Young REP based at the theatre she would feel out of place. They are not alone in this view, as there is a general conception from many people that theatre is a white, middle class pursuit (Harland

*et al.*, 1995, p38; Sierz, 2011, p239; Cochrane, 2010, p131-2; Bennett, 1997, p89).

Unfortunately, for Zahid, this perception became a reality when he attended a steering group hosted by Hannah Phillips and myself: “I came to your meeting and it was a lot of white middle class people and you would feel out of place there.”

### **As audience members**

When presented with the statement ‘I have performed at The REP’, nine questionnaire respondents strongly disagreed and six disagreed (with two missing). Responses to the statement ‘I went to see theatre at The REP’ were more diverse, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing (12) and four disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (and one missing response). The young people I interviewed had all seen productions at The REP - Aisha told me she had seen *Once on this Island* and *His Dark Materials*, Naveed had seen a few plays and specifically remembered *East is East*. They had gone with the school as voluntary trips, but both Yacoub and Salima had gone to The REP with their families as well. When asked why they had wanted to go, Aisha and Salima identified the lively, fun and exciting atmosphere, and Yacoub said it was because, “It caters for everyone when you go and watch a show, you’ll get some horror and Sci-Fi and stuff and *Rafta Rafta* and *East is East* you got like loads of Asian people coming to watch it. Because they could really see how it was similar to them”. Whereas Naveed thought The REP put on enough productions to bring in an Asian audience, Zahid thought that they could do more and that, “The last one was *East is East* that I saw a big Asian crowd”.

I arranged with Samantha Hughes to bring the five participants I would later interview to The REP before the theatre closed, so that they could photograph the areas of The REP that they felt were important to them (Zahid was unable to attend). It was a Friday morning (10.12.2010) and when they arrived they were all really excited to be out of school and at the theatre. They told me that although they had all seen productions at The REP none of

them had performed there or been backstage. Samantha Hughes had told me in her interview that the *Small Heath Young REP* group were meant to have had a backstage tour but something had prevented it, and that in regard to the building, “They think it’s massive! They think it’s a bit overwhelming.”

### **As performers**

Access to the backstage of a theatre is significant because it is an area which is normally kept private and separate from the audience: “the stage door is the physical manifestation of the demarcation between the world at large and the ‘secret kingdom’ of the theatre practitioners, between public and private, between outside and inside” (McAuley, 1999, p67). McAuley (1999) goes on to draw on Lefebvre’s writings on space to highlight that controlling who has admission to backstage is part of a general way that power is demonstrated through regulating access (p71). As the young people had never performed at The REP they had never been granted access to this backstage area. Incidentally, my own role as a sometime insider would have gained backstage access for myself, but was not powerful enough to gain it for the young people. Therefore we had to be accompanied at all times by the Theatre Manager.

The Theatre Manager was able to give us a backstage tour and the young people, with a camera each, listened to explanations of what things were and eagerly photographed everything. They took pictures backstage of the entrance to Stage door, Bob sitting at Stage Door desk, the props table, dressing room mirror (with lights around it), the stage, sound and lighting desk, lights and the flies. In the auditorium they photographed the seats (from the stage) and the orchestra pit. Front of House they captured the posters, quotes from audience members, rehearsal stills, the confectionary booth and the entrance to the auditorium. Outside, they took the front exterior, the main entrance and even the building



work. Aisha said it was smaller than she had imagined, Yacoub said the dressing rooms looked like a prison, and Salima had enjoyed being on the stage most of all. They all told me that they wanted to perform there (Field notes).

Not having had access to the backstage and performance areas of The REP had impacted on how the group related to the theatre (the group performed at The REP a few years previously as part of a Shakespeare festival, but none of the current group had been participants at that time). They did not have 'insider' status or a familiarity with the backstage parts of the building. As geographer Yi Fu Tuan (1977) notes, one can relate to the visual element of a place fairly rapidly, but the 'feel' of an environment is acquired through multiple experiences of it over a long time (p183). Therefore, the young people were able to enjoy seeing the different areas and photographing them, but when we explored these photographs in a drama research workshop they only related to them as a *space* where theatre happens, and not a *place* within which they had social interactions (Govan *et al.*, 2007, p104).



(Photograph above - taken by *Small Heath Young REP* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre December 2010)

I chose to use the photographs that they had taken at The REP as part of a drama research workshop to explore their relationship with the theatre building, because “Using visual methods can also act as prompts to encourage research participant to reflect on their physical environments” (Morrow, 2011, p69). Rhys McClelland and I used the images as stimulus for the young people to create still and moving images, representing their relationship to different parts of the building. They were able to show context specific scenes with ease, such as people drinking in the bar, an actor getting hair and make-up done in the dressing room, an actor auditioning on stage and posters advertising shows in front of house. However, as they had very few or no personal memories of those spaces, they did not place themselves as performers into those spaces or refer to direct experiences that they had had there. They recognised that the theatre was a building where certain things happened, so they were able to ascribe meaning to it, and produced representations of different jobs that would be held within any theatre (Tuan, 1977, p136). However, they were unable to truly transform space into place because they did not have sufficient personal memories to embed into the building (Massey, 2005, p130). Thus their images were generic, not in any way personal, and could as easily have been produced if given images from the RSC or the Coventry Belgrade Theatre (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003, p13).

### **Theatre as about people**

As Kenyan writer Thiong’o (2009) notes, “Theatre is not a building. People make theatre. Their life is the very stuff of drama”(p263). This dynamic between people and theatre is also noted by Cresswell (2004), who highlights that for spaces to be seen as places, they need to have a relationship with humans(p7). The young people demonstrated the importance they assigned to people in relation to theatre when we asked them to show us what was missing from the pictures of The REP. Each group either created images of the (generic) staff and performers at The REP or the action of rehearsing and performing. One

group noted that without people the theatre was “lifeless”, and Zahid said that what was missing was “the changing atmosphere as it goes along, tension at the beginning and relief at the end” (Small Heath Research Workshop 16.2.11). Although they may not have many memories of the theatre building, their own experience of rehearsing and performing gave them a personal understanding of the role that people have in making theatre and what that feels like. There is a certain truth in this blending of theatre as a form and theatre as a building, as theatre is maybe the only art form which has the same name for both the medium and for the space it occurs in (McAuley, 1999, p1).

They again demonstrated an understanding that a theatre is more than just a building when given the continuum *The REP is the building* at one end and *The REP has a life of its own outside of the Building* at the other. Most of them chose to go to ‘*A life of its own*’, with only one person choosing it as ‘*Just a building*’ and three standing centrally. From the centre comments included: “It is a building and has a life of its own”, “It’s not just a building because it is filled with memories and special events” and “It’s the people that make The REP. It could just be any old building but because so many people have been up there, they’ve put their work up there”. This identification that the theatre is more than its building was again shown through questionnaire responses, which although mixed, demonstrated that most of the young people regarded The REP as more than its building - When given the statement in the questionnaire (20.4.11) ‘The REP still has an identity without a building’ one strongly disagreed and one disagreed, two were unsure but the majority, eleven, agreed or strongly agreed (with two missing responses). This is perhaps not surprising, as the young people of *Small Heath’s* strongest link to The REP was the youth theatre directors, who came to their school on a weekly basis.

However, as I discussed in the literature review, in order to ensure theatres are vital and dynamic places and that young people from all backgrounds see them as part of their

cultural entitlement, theatre buildings need to be places that young people feel happy accessing (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p29; McAuley, 1999, p47; Kershaw 1999:31-32 in Govan *et al.*, 2007, p7; Nicholson, 2011, p209; Neelands, 2011, p3). An important way of ensuring this is by opening the buildings up to them, and this involves bringing the young people into the theatre space in a way that they feel valued and safe (Potts & Coventon, 2011, p177; Nicholson, 2011, p208).

### **Theatre as about The REP**

In order to explore how connected the young people felt to the theatre building, as part of the same workshop I placed a chair in the centre of the room and told them it represented the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. I then invited them to step in to make up aspects of a picture of The REP theatre by stating 'I am' and adding an element of the theatre. They offered some theatre specific professions such as actress, costume designer, make up person, writer and guy in the [box?] office, and two people said audience. Therefore they demonstrated good knowledge of theatre professions. They also volunteered tourist and 'I'm looking around', showing the concept of the theatre as a tourist destination. However, they additionally made some offers that would be more applicable for a West End theatre, for example 'I'm Billy Elliot' and 'I'm a comedian'. The offer of 'I'm the owner' showed that they are not aware that it is a publicly funded building. Three responses were particularly intriguing:

"I'm Beyonce singing at The REP"

"I'm Eminem singing, rapping at The REP"

"I'm the Queen watching the play"

Although I hid my reaction during the workshop, I was very surprised when they offered these suggestions, as they seemed so far removed from my own experience of The REP.

When discussing this with a colleague she wondered whether they were drawing on the Royal Variety Show as their reference point rather than The REP. It certainly demonstrated that their experience of The REP was limited.

This limited experience is important, because it directly effects how connected the young people feel to the theatre. This is crucial because as theatre historian Clare Cochrane (2010) notes, “The question of how the ‘new British’ descendants of migrant families are to become an integral part of the cultural mainstream as represented by the major producing theatres, has much deeper implications about the health of a genuinely multi-cultural society”(p131). The young people’s participation in the Young REP group at their school did give them a certain bond to the theatre, and during a steering group with other Young REP members from different groups Zahid was keen to express his sense of pride at being part of the theatre: “I like it, you walk past here and you think ‘I do Young REP’ and you feel proud when you see the building.”. However, when another Satellite member (Zahid) expressed ambiguity about the relationship, he was able to reflect more deeply on his own:

“I feel the same as Robert [from Shenley Young REP] because you do your own shows, you feel proud when you see The REP and then you come here to see a show or something you realise you are part of the Young REP, but you come here and you don’t know anyone. You know everyone at your satellite group, you know Rhys, then you come here and you don’t know anyone. It’s a bit like you’re part of it, but you’re not part of it.”

A feeling of belonging to a place is bound up with being inside it and negotiating within it (Massey, 2005, p154; Relph 1976,49 in Cresswell, 2004, p44). Geographer Dennis Smith (1987) explains that “the sense of attachment to a place is most strongly felt when the two forms of belonging – a relationship of possession and a relationship of membership – coincide for a group or individual” (p279). Zahid recognised that he had membership to

The REP by virtue of belonging to a Young REP group, but the relationship of possession was missing, and thus the attachment to place was not as strongly felt as it was by those youth theatre members whose groups had rehearsed at The REP building before it went dark (which I will discuss in detail later). He reiterated this feeling of being in-between - belonging and not belonging - in the group interviews, when he drew on my description of Birmingham as being made up of a lot of villages that joined together to describe their relationship to the other Young REP groups: “it’s like how you said about the villages in Birmingham, it’s like we’re one of the villages (Yacoub and Naveed agree), like the *Small Heath Young REP* and then we go up to use the big one, we’re linked, but we’re still like our own little thing”.

### ***Without a building***

When I asked Rhys McClelland in his initial interview what the reaction of the young people of Small Heath would be to The REP theatre building closing, he emphatically stated, “I don’t think they’ll notice at all one jot that the building’s not there anymore”. He felt that it may in fact be a positive thing for them, as “[...] they’re more on an even keel now in terms of their identity within the organisation. 2011 is the year of the satellites probably”. Reflecting a year on, he agreed that he did not think they had noticed its closure. The questionnaires showed a mixed response to the theatre’s closure. When given the statement ‘I do not miss The REP theatre now it is closed’, seven respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed and two agreed or strongly agreed with eight neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The high number of participants who were unsure of their feelings again demonstrates their uncertain relationship with the theatre building.

During the research workshop when I asked if they knew the building was closing, only those who had participated in the photographing session at the theatre were aware. I set up a continuum with at one end the statement ‘*Birmingham REP being closed would be a*

*disaster'* and at the other end the statement '*Birmingham REP being closed would be an opportunity*', and the majority of the young people took up a position in the middle, suggesting a degree of ambivalence or an ability to reflect that it could have a mixture of positive and negative outcomes. None of the explanations for their positions given by the young people related to how it would affect them or suggested any personal connection to the building. An example comment from the middle was "It will probably give more theatre groups an opportunity". From the disaster end of the continuum one comment was, "If it was closed, it would be a shame as The REP is really big". Showing a sense of business opportunity, a comment from the opportunity end was "Do you know if the Birmingham Repertory Theatre was closed it would give more little businesses more opportunities and you could buy shares".

When I re-visited the exercise with the chair, this time as The REP *without* a building, they once again offered a variety of generic theatre professions including actor, producer, manager and costume designer, suggesting they had understood that the theatre's work would be going on without the building. They also included professions relevant to the fact that there will be construction taking place, including "I am someone building on the site" and "I am a construction worker". There was a sense that some of the young people were not taking the exercise seriously, as a few of the suggestions were made for comedy effect such as "I am a nun". This could be interpreted as having a lack of identification with the building and thus not being particularly invested in the idea that it will be closed for a long time.

### ***An In-between zone***

As I have discussed above, the young people in Small Heath face a variety of barriers to attending the Young REP in the centre of Birmingham. One of these barriers I discussed above is the geographical issue of having to travel into the city centre, which for many of

the young people would involve parental accompaniment. Another is due to not having inherited the cultural capital to attend the theatre regularly, resulting in a lack of knowledge about the existence of the Young REP, which is demonstrated by Salima's assertion that she wouldn't have joined Young REP if it wasn't based at her school, "Just because I wouldn't know enough about it to go".

Although Steve Ball's decision to establish the group in the school building removes these barriers to attending the youth theatre, the facilitation of the group on school premises also challenges how liminal the space is that the Young REP participants are experiencing. Hughes and Wilson (2004) identified that the liminality of youth theatre was one of its assets, by offering, "[...] a context, outside of normal routines, for young people to explore uncharted social territories or individual possibilities and experiment with different ways of playing a part in social processes" (p69). However, this liminality was in part provided by it taking part in "[...] a non-institutionalized space" (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p69). The five participants I interviewed all identified that having rehearsals after school in their school building meant that the school day affected the atmosphere in rehearsals. Zahid noted, "Because it's the same building it's like we've been at school all day and then we come to do something different but it's still at school." and Salima that, "It's a bit like another lesson". They even distinguished that meeting on a Saturday (as they had done in previous years) or for holiday rehearsals made a difference to how they felt in the space, Zahid explained, "You still knew it was school but you knew you were going there to do something different."

I observed that when the young people attended a half term rehearsal in their own clothes the atmosphere was more relaxed and their personalities were more obvious. The young people also identified that being in school uniform made a difference to how they felt



during rehearsals, and that wearing uniform intensified the associations of being in a school building:

Me: Do you think that still being in uniform makes a difference?

Yacoub: Yeah that does.

Naveed: That does definitely that does, and the drama studio sometimes it feels like you're still in school. You are in school but...

Yacoub: You're more aware that the drama studio is a school building (agreement from others)

Me: Because you're in uniform?

Naveed: It just feels a bit strange

However, they said that the drama studio felt different to them when in a Young REP rehearsal, rather than when they were in a curriculum drama lesson or school play rehearsal. The way space is experienced and conceptualised is greatly affected by what happens within it, as Nicholson (2011) states (drawing on Lefebvre):

“[...] space always holds different and sometimes contradictory meanings that change over time and according to context and circumstances. These meanings are neither fixed nor objective, but continually negotiated in and through social practice” (p11).

Nicholson also notes that when theatre comes into a school it introduces representational space into the conceived space of education, offering the potential for disruption of the usual school structures (2011, p12). The young people identified that the atmosphere in curriculum classes was effected by the presence of other students who were not as keen on drama; for example, Yacoub noted, “[...] last year when I was doing drama, people,

other pupils some of them didn't want to do it, like they weren't dedicated so they just messed about. So it didn't feel as professional, it just felt like another classroom basically". Naveed felt the same and said "[...] the students aren't that serious if it's on the timetable and they're forced to do it".

The geographer Cresswell (2004) identifies that place is performed and open and offers the possibility of creating identities rather than providing an essentialised notion of them (p39). The relationships that are formed with spaces are in part due to the codes which are experienced within them, and the young people were able to identify a range of codes that affected how they regarded the school drama studio when in a Young REP rehearsal rather than a school lesson (Lefebvre, 1991, p18). Firstly, they identified the professionalism that Rhys McClelland brought, for example Yacoub stated, "[...] more experienced people are running it. It's like in a school play sometimes teachers are telling you what to do, but here directors are proper directors". Hannah Phillips regarded this professionalism from The REP as an important facet of the youth theatre provision that they offer:

"The fact that we are The REP and Young REP there has to be, I feel really strongly, there has to be something else that we offer, that's different to other youth theatre provision, whether that's Stage 2, whether that's Stagecoach, whether that's school drama or after school clubs, what is it that we provide as this professional industry link, that provides something different, a different kind of experience and quality of performance and process".

Clearly the young people valued this as well.

Secondly, they highlighted the higher expectations that came from this professionalism.

Salima noted, "I think you have to be a bit more professional when you're doing Young REP (agreement from others) because if you mess up in class it's not a big deal", and Yacoub

said, "School play... they don't have that high an expectation of you". The focus of a performance with more professional expectations motivated them to work harder, as Zahid explained:

"[...] and its knowing that there's going to be a big performance at the end of it, it makes you work differently than you would do in class. Because in class if you're told you're going to be doing a little play at the end of the term you wouldn't really work that hard on it, unless it was for an exam, but when you're coming to The REP you know that people are going to come and watch this, your families going to come and watch this. It's not like its pressure, it *is* pressure, but it's a good pressure, because you get excited about it".

Zahid's observations also demonstrate the importance he is placing on two of the key components of effective youth theatre identified by Hughes and Wilson (2004) - providing opportunities for young people to take part in performance and involving a sense of urgency, commitment to work hard and working to real deadlines (p62). Therefore, although the drama studio may not be as liminal a space as a community arts centre or theatre may be for the young people, the room did take on a different meaning and atmosphere for the young people when they were in a Young REP rehearsal.

There is also the possibility that rehearsing and performing in the school hall offers a liminality that a theatre building itself cannot offer. For example, Govan *et al.* highlight Baz Kershaw's assertion that theatre's intimidating buildings and established codes limit the potential for genuine creativity and social critique, and Jackson claims that most of the really exciting theatre actually happens outside of theatre buildings (Kershaw in Govan *et al.*, 2007, p7; Jackson, 2010, p22). However, the high status of the theatre building meant that the young people themselves saw it as a desirable place to perform (Field notes).

## **Conclusion**

A youth theatre group based in a large city, in a school in an area where the majority of residents are Pakistani and Muslim, creates a liminal space due to the liminal natures of: youth; performance; youth theatre and diaspora (Wulff, 1995, p1; Buckingham, 2000, p3-4; Valentine *et al.*, 1998, p5; Schechner, 2002, p45; Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p69; Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p5). The way that the annual performances had been embraced by a school within a community where performance is not a cultural norm demonstrated the potential for complex identity negotiations and playfulness that liminal space brings.

However, the group had a liminal relationship with the theatre. They recognised that by attending the Young REP they had a link to the building, but the opportunity for them to feel that they belonged in the building had not been exploited due to real and perceived barriers created by their ethnicities. Therefore their relationship to the building was abstract rather than embedded, and the Learning and Participation staff was keen to address this but this was complicated by the closure of the building for two years.

The ethical and aesthetic choices regarding performance material were also affected by the ethnicities of the group. Respect for Islamic beliefs and a fear on behalf of The REP of causing upset had kept the group from moving beyond the more frivolous material of pantomime. However, Rhys McClelland was keen to give the young people a wider range of opportunities, including access to classical texts like Shakespeare, and to engage in dialogue about how founded these assumptions about appropriateness were. By the end of my field work, this was in full swing.

In the next section I will explore the role that socio-economic class has in the way that young people relate to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in an exploration of *Shenley Junior Young REP*.

## **Case Study Two: Shenley Academy Young REP**

**How does social class effect the aesthetic and ethical decisions that the Birmingham**

**Repertory Theatre make about their youth theatre and the way that young people relate to the theatre building?**

### **Introduction**

This case study will explore the relationship between the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and its satellite Young REP group situated in Shenley Academy, Weoley Castle, Birmingham, an area where the majority of the residents are working class and there is significant socio-economic deprivation. Paying particular attention to class, I will consider the effect that the catchment area of the school had on the aesthetic and ethical decisions, made by The REP, about the youth theatre group. Through an examination of space and place I will also investigate the way that the youth theatre participants relate to the theatre both with and without a building, exploring the ways in which performing at The REP theatre affected the depth of this relationship. I will explore the significance of the term 'chav', the impact on the young people's perception of their own area as 'chavy', and how this contributes to the geographical and cultural (capital) barriers to attending the theatre. I will also consider how the group identity is affected by their attachment to a school and whether the presence of The REP in the school opens up a liminal space.

### **Identity Descriptors**

**Natalie Hart**, I am a 31 year old white female with Celtic heritage and working class roots, drama facilitator and PhD researcher.

#### Shenley Academy Junior Young REP

**Kendhal**, 15, Lives in Quinton Birmingham, Member of the Birmingham REP Theatre, Started acting at the age of 12, Wants a career as a Dr but has interest in acting

**Morgan**, 13 year old female from Birmingham in year 9 at Shenley Academy. Likes musical theatre quite a lot

**Davina**, 13 year old white female, Interested in future career involving acting and the way people relate to each other, also interested in playwriting

**William**, I am 11 year old White male who lives in Birmingham. I am a member of the Young REP group of Shenley and am thoroughly interested in drama

**Elisa**, 13 years old, white female, I like acting, dancing, singing and playing guitar, I go to Shenley Academy and I am in Year 8

#### Shenley Senior Young REP

**Rory**, I'm 17 years old, white male I am a happy lad outgoing easy to get on with, British Citizen. I study at sixth form

**Jamie**, I'm 17 years old, white, male and am a student at Shenley Court Academy hoping to go to University to study History

**Peter**, I am 17 years old, Caucasian with ginger hair. I have Irish, Scottish and English family backgrounds, with my family being of working class.

**Trent**, I am 18 years old. I'm full British and have a part time job as a bar man whilst doing A-levels.

#### School Staff

**Stephen Lane** – Drama teacher, Senior Examiner, UCAS advisor, worked mainly in inner city schools in Manchester and London before moving to Birmingham

#### REP Staff

**Steve Ball**, I am a 52 year old white urban theatre professional gay father

**Hannah Phillips**, 33 year old Queer female with Jewish heritage. Theatre maker, lecturer and facilitator

**Rhys McClelland** , 33 year old white male with Celtic heritage and working class roots, youth theatre director and passionate learner

**Associate Producer (BAMETI)**, I am a 30 year old Welsh, mixed race female to a black Jamaican father and white, Welsh mother, heterosexual, university graduate with working class roots who has a senior management role in theatre.

## **Group Identity**

### ***Origins of Shenley Academy Young REP***

*Shenley Academy Young REP* was established in 2002 when the school was awarded Specialist Arts Status (then called Shenley Court Specialist Arts College and Sixth Form Centre). The Head of Drama, Stephen Lane, explained to me that the Specialist Arts Status required the school to both enhance the curriculum and engage with the community. They approached several arts organisations in the city to build partnerships, and one of these was the Birmingham REP. The theatre was also keen to establish links within the community and to broaden the demographic of their youth theatre. Therefore it was decided, after consultation with the students, to establish two groups - a Junior Young REP and a Senior Young REP, both meeting after school on school premises. Originally the Junior Young REP group was to focus on enhancing the curriculum as a way to encourage more students to take drama as an option subject, and the Senior Young REP was to concentrate on creating performances. The function of both groups has changed over the eleven years. The REP was also the Arts Champion<sup>27</sup> for the constituency area of Northfield in which the school resides, from 2008 to 2011.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/artschampions>

There have been several youth theatre directors working with the groups during the thirteen year relationship. I was the youth theatre director for *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* from January 2005 to July 2007, and therefore I already knew several of the older participants.

I attended some rehearsals and one performance - *Aladdin*, in The Door in 2007 - as part of my preliminary fieldwork. During my main field work, from October 2010 to July 2011, Rhys McClelland was the director of both groups. The Young REP met on Tuesdays in one of the drama classrooms. *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* were working with Rhys McClelland during their A-Level curriculum time to improve the results on one of the sections of their exam, and the *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* met straight after school to work towards performances.

### ***Shenley Academy***

Shenley Academy is a co-educational school which was opened in 2009 on the site of its predecessor school, Shenley Court Specialist Arts College and Sixth Form Centre, and in 2012 it moved into new purpose built premises. The (now former) school building was erected in the 1950's and 1960's, and was in poor condition and when I visited it did not feel like an inspiring place. In 2011 Ofsted described the school as average-sized with specialisms in performing and creative arts and in science. It serves an area that experiences significant social and economic disadvantage, the large majority of students are from a white British heritage but with a range of other minority ethnic groups represented, the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is exceptionally high, the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure, and the proportion with a



statement of special educational needs is broadly average<sup>28</sup>. In 2011 Ofsted designated the school as outstanding due to students' academic achievement and their wider personal development (Ofsted, 135911, 2–3 November 2011).

When the theatre first engaged with the school in 2003 it was experiencing significant problems, which led to an Ofsted Report in 2005 which stated that, "[...] the school provides a poor standard of education and poor value for money. Standards are well below average and pupils seriously underachieve. Pupils' behaviour, teaching, learning, care, leadership and management are all poor. The curriculum is unsatisfactory" (Ofsted 14th – 18<sup>th</sup>, 272736, March, 2005). Shenley went into special measures the same year. Special measures is an Ofsted status applied in the following circumstances:

"Schools are made subject to special measures under section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, where the Chief Inspector is of the opinion that: '...the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.'" (Ofsted.gov.uk)

A school that is in special measures may have its staff and/or governors replaced, will have regular short-notice Ofsted inspections to monitor improvement, and if there is no improvement could face closure. Shenley's status of special measures had a substantial effect on the way that it was perceived, both internally and externally, as was discussed by three members of Senior Young REP during a group interview on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011 – Rory, Jamie and Peter:

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<sup>28</sup><http://www.tes.co.uk/Upload/Attachments/TES/0321410001/Shenley%20Academy%20OFSTED%20Report.pdf>

Rory: I think it's quite prejudice like, because people know us to have failed Ofsted and that, like people think oh yeah it's a bad school blah blah blah, but I think when people actually come and do look for themselves they realise it's not as bad as people do say and it's quite friendly as well. Like 'cos we're a specialist in drama and that and people do like to perform, like with *Billy Elliot* as well that's going on soon, it does show that people do want to do stuff like.

Jamie: As soon as we failed Ofsted it was like Shenley is a really bad school (*agreement from others*) and we never really gonna live that down, that we was once bad.

Rory: But that was in the past and people have to forget.

Peter: We're the last generation aren't we of the failed school (*agreement from others*). That's odd to think about!

Subsequent monitoring visits went well, and In November 2006 the school came out of special measures. In 2009 Ofsted described the school as good<sup>29</sup> (Ofsted 25–26 February 2009), and by the time my fieldwork commenced in October 2010 the school had made good progress towards raising standards (Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Shenley Academy 361983 Ofsted 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010).

### ***Weoley Castle and Northfield***

Shenley Academy is located in Weoley Castle, which is part of the parliamentary constituency of Northfield, an outer suburb in the South West of Birmingham. Stephen Lane identified that the area suffers from stigmatization, and the young people offered a similar picture: Trent noted, "Weoley Castle has a bad name but I'm not too sure about

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.educationadviser.co.uk/ofsted-Report/shenley-court-specialist-arts-college-and-sixth-form-centre>

Northfield”, leading Peter to answer, “Not any better”. Rory explained the effect this has on the perception of their school, “I think that’s why people also take Shenley as to be in the centre of it ‘cos it’s in the middle of the two they say ‘cos it’s bad both ends then ...”. When I asked Rhys McClelland how he would describe the area, he acknowledged that his main opinions were formed from what other people had told him, and that the picture they painted was that it was a challenging, white working class area with some issues of racism. His own experience was that attendance could be sporadic, as often young people had to pick up their younger brothers and sisters from school.

Some of the stigmatisation stems from the very real issues of socioeconomic deprivation: Stephen Lane describes the demographics of the school as, “[...] a high proportion of students are on free school meals, we have a high number of students for whom going to the University is not the norm, whether that be first generation, we have a high number of students who don’t access the arts across Birmingham, let alone the Birmingham REP. We are in an area of high unemployment, low aspiration, low attainment, at KS3, Year 7 reading ages are considerably low”. House prices are £65,000 below the national average<sup>30</sup>; average weekly household income is £110 less than the average for the West Midlands region<sup>31</sup>; benefits claimants in the working age bracket were 33% compared to 22% in Birmingham and a national average of 15%<sup>32</sup>. The MG Rover factory at nearby Longbridge was a major employer of people in Northfield and its closure in 2005 made 6,300 workers redundant. Those who were re-employed elsewhere earned a fifth less in their new role (Jones, 2011, p151 and p190). Columnist and writer Owen Jones (2011)

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<sup>30</sup><http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=3&b=6275020&c=B29+4HE&g=373373&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6291776&m=1&p=3&q=1&r=0&s=1369051416703&enc=1&tab=4&inWales=false>

<sup>31</sup><http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=3&b=6275020&c=B29+4HE&g=373373&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6291776&m=1&p=3&q=1&r=0&s=1369051416703&enc=1&tab=4&inWales=false>

<sup>32</sup><http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/NeighbourhoodProfile.do?a=3&b=6275020&c=B29+4HE&g=373373&i=1001x1012x1013&j=6291776&m=1&p=3&q=1&r=0&s=1369051416703&enc=1&tab=4&inWales=false>

compared the effect of the collapse of Longbridge to the effect the closure of the mines had on mining towns: in both cases, he notes, “[...] there is a lack of good, secure jobs and plenty of people out of work through no fault of their own” (p193). He describes the communities as being plunged into despair and prey to a plethora of social issues associated with deprivation, including anti-social behaviour, drug use and relationship breakdown (Jones, 2011, p193).

The way that the young people felt about the area varied. The questionnaire responses from the *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* showed that nine out of 15 of the participants thought that their local community was friendly, with only one response strongly disagreeing and four being unsure (and one missing). Ten respondents felt part of their local community, with only one disagreeing strongly, three being unsure (and one missing). The catchment area of the school also included Quinton and Harborne, and as I did not specify where I meant when I used the word community, some differences in opinion may relate to exactly where the young people live. The members of *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* that I interviewed were keen to stress that much of the negative reputation of the area came from people who didn’t actually live there and were responding to undesirable publicity:

Rory:            People don’t like know, they haven’t actually been, I don’t know they can’t say, there might be other people from different places saying that and then as I said before they’ve never been and seen it for themselves in parts.

Jamie:           I’ve had it myself, ‘Where do you live?’ ‘Weoley Castle’ ‘Where’s that by?’ ‘Northfield.’ ‘Oh that’s not a nice place. But I’ve never really lived there, I’ve been there but...’

Trent:                Then because certain accidents happen which are highlighted in the press  
                              which then give that place a bad reputation.

Jamie demonstrated a more balanced appraisal of the area: “Weoley Castle’s like crap in places....But it’s alright in others”.

However, in a group interview *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* were much more negative about their area: when I asked them to describe it they all laughed and Davina clarified, “Weoley Castle is the sort of place where you don’t want to live”. William explained “It’s not the best place in Birmingham to live”, to more laughter, and when Elisa complained about teenagers, Morgan added “[...] with gangs and stuff, when you’re walking on your own and there’s like people, I sometimes cross the road.” I asked them where their negative opinion of the area came from - whether it was from their own experiences or other people’s opinions, and Elisa replied, “Opinions and my own experience because whenever I have a bike in my back garden or a scooter or something I go back and it’s just like gone.”, and Morgan agreed, “Someone climbed over my back fence and robbed my bike”. They describe several incidents to illustrate to me why they did not regard it as a nice area to live, including people urinating against walls, spitting, muggings and arguments between different types of people. Khendal thought that the area spoke for itself and said to me, “What you see. Have you ever walked round here? You catch the bus....you see enough when you catch the bus”.

### ***Class***

*“...where Marx was onto something was in his insistence that the material circumstances of people’s existence – physical, financial, environmental – do matter in influencing their life chances, their sense of identity, and the historical part which they and their contemporaries may (or may not) play... Go to Toxteth, go to Wandsworth, go to Tyneside, go to Balsall Heath, and tell the people who live in the slums and the council estates and the high-rise*

*ghettos that their sense of social structure and social identity is no more than a subjective rhetorical construction that is nothing beyond a collection of individual self-categorisations. It seems unlikely that they will agree. Nor, for that matter, would the inhabitants of Edgbaston or Eastborne, Belgravia or Buckingham Palace.”(Cannadine, 1998, p17)*

I quote the above section at length because it eloquently describes the lived, everyday experiences of class, and resonates strongly with a conversation that the *Shenley Junior Young REP* had in their group interview. I asked them if they thought Birmingham had a community:

Davina: No

Khendal: It depends where you are.

Natalie: What do you mean?

Khendal: If I was in like, what’s a good place? Edgbaston

*(laughter)*

Davina: That’s not a good place that’s a posh place!

Morgan: Solihull or summat

Khendal: Yeah if I was there I would probably feel part of it yeah

The word community is evocative, and Khendal is responding to a sense of community as safe, comforting and secure. He sees these things as lacking in his own neighbourhood and imagines that they would exist somewhere more affluent (Bauman, 2001, p1).

As I discussed in the section on race and ethnicity it is important to take a pluralist approach to social analysis. However, as I explored in the section on class, social class is still a significant factor to consider, and I will do so whilst also acknowledging other

complex and intersecting factors, including ethnicity (Bennett, 2009, p25; Cannadine, 1998, p2; Modood, 2007, p59). The links between class, participation and social equality are deeply embedded. The reality of social inequality is that the class and ethnicity a child is born into will have a marked impact on their life chances (Barry, 2005, p41). Class, especially in terms of economic income, has a pronounced effect on civic and cultural participation, and participation in turn affects social equality (Morrow, 2011, p66; Leverett, 2011, p16; Bennett, 2009, p201). As Bourdieu and Johnson (1993) note:

“Although they do not create or cause class divisions and inequalities, ‘art and cultural consumption are pre-disposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences’ and thus contribute to the process of social reproduction.” (p2).

Cultural capital has a two way relationship with social class and social mobility, by on the one hand being more accessible to people of privileged classes, and on the other hand helping them to demonstrate their class status and gain access to positions of power (Bourdieu, 1974, p37-38; Bennett, 2009, p13).

The fact that *Shenley Academy Young REP* is located in an area which, due to its socio-economic profile, would be described as working class, makes it a pertinent issue to consider when examining the relationship that the participants of *Shenley Academy Young REP* have with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. This is particularly significant in terms of barriers to access - both economic and social - as Belfiore & Bennett note (2007):

“All the participation and attendance surveys already cited agree that class, education and profession are, combined, clear predictors of engagements with the arts. The better educated, wealthy, and those employed in managerial or professional jobs are the most regular and frequent arts attenders” (p253).

It also has an effect on the performance choices of their youth theatre director, the way that the young people perceive themselves, and the way that they are perceived from the outside. Both the image and for some the reality of working class life have undertaken a significant shift in recent years, and terms such as 'chav' and 'underclass' have come into prevalence.

### ***Chavs***

The word 'chav' came into the popular lexicon in the first decade of this century, although the actual etymology of the word is debated and includes it being an acronym for Council Housed and Violent, or alternatively the Romani word for child, 'chavi'. It is debated as to whether it refers to white working class people or an anti-social underclass. However, when the term entered the English Dictionary in 2005 it was summarised as, 'a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothing', and Owen Jones (2011) believes that it is primarily an insulting term for the working classes (p8). Jones draws attention to the fact that even where it is argued that 'chav' refers not to working class people but to an anti-social underclass, an attack on 'chavs' is still an attack on the working classes. He explains that many of the behaviours and issues of this so called underclass that are criticised (poverty, violence, illiteracy) are symptoms of industrial collapse, social housing changes, and the legacies of Thatcherism that all disproportionately affected the traditional working class (Ibid, p33). He sees 'chavs' as a construct which justifies an unequal society by blaming poverty on individual behaviours and a lack of worthiness (Ibid, p137). This point is supported by political and popular culture writer Rhian E. Jones (2013), who notes:

“Debates around 'chavs' are, of course, part of a longer tradition in which class is constructed, imposed and resisted through the use of signifiers and stereotypes.

As a word, the meaning of 'chav' is impossibly contested, but as specific idea, a



commonly-understood stereotype, and an indiscriminate term of abuse of the poor, it has developed a peculiar and politically loaded edge” (p3).

Owen Jones (2011) also disputes the argument that the term is only used to refer to those who are a so called anti-social underclass, because in popular culture and media coverage ‘chavs’ are often seen as synonymous with all white working class (p8). Jones highlights the hypocrisy that ‘chav’ hate is frequently regarded as acceptable by the same people who would consider racist terms to be unacceptable and agree that the social factors and discrimination faced by ethnic minority groups can explain unemployment and poverty, and yet do not agree that the same reasons can explain the same issues experienced by white working class people (p116-117).

Class bias and stereotyping are still prevalent and can be very vocal. When moving house two years ago I got into a conversation with the Birmingham born van driver we hired about where about in Birmingham I grew up: “South Yardley”, I told him, to which he responded laughing, “Yard-ley, didn’t they invent the first chav there?” . A friend of mine told me of a time she was out for dinner with fellow law students at the University of Warwick when one of them declared “I mean we’re all middle class here”, my friend replied (slightly hesitantly as she found the group to be on the whole fairly intimidating) “Actually I’m working class”. His shocked response was “Really? But you dress so nicely”. In July 2013 a former reality TV show contestant shocked daytime television programme *This Morning* hosts Phillip Schofield and Holly Willoughby when she unrelentingly described how she picked the friends of her children based on their names<sup>33</sup>. She explained that she saw it as short hand for what class they came from and proceeded to spew working class stereotypes. Although the presenters, a fellow guest and the majority of the people voting on the issue disagreed with her, she said that in private many mothers came up to her to

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edZjdgU0asM>

say they agreed with her sentiments. As journalist Barbara Ellen commented in the Observer on the incident, “[...] the fact that Hopkins felt empowered to air this opinion may say more than we'd care to admit, not only about the undercurrent of hatred of the poor in Britain, but also its growing confidence and visibility.” (Ellen, Sunday 7th July, 2013). In a Guardian (a left wing paper, although free to access by anyone on the internet) Poll on the subject, 22% of those who answered said they judged people by their first names<sup>34</sup>.

Rhian E. Jones (2013) notes that the explosion of ‘chav’ stereotypes in the media has coincided with access to the arts becoming increasingly narrow, thus reducing understanding and empathy for working classes within the sector and limiting, “[...]the ability to strike back” (p20)

The term ‘chav’ has a particular relevance to *Shenley Academy Young REP*, as the derogatory website *Chavtowns* describes Weoley castle as “[...]the city’s chavviest district”<sup>35</sup>. It includes references to teachers at Shenley carrying out, “[...]crowd control of the horrendous Chavs of the next generation”<sup>36</sup> and refers to many ‘chav’ stereotypes such as Burberry clothes, crime, fast food, truancy and illiteracy. Northfield gets similar treatment as being apparently, “[...]full of ‘the arse drippings of society’ and ‘toothless tattooed chav mums’”<sup>37</sup> (Jones, 2011, p190). Significantly, the Young REP participants from Weoley Castle and Northfield regarded their own neighbourhood as ‘chavvy’. When I asked them to describe their local area, Morgan simply stated “Chavs” and Davina, to Elisa’s agreement, responded, “Yeah Weoley Castle is the chavvy place”. These girls then described having lived there for most or all of their lives. They used it as a derogatory term, and despite living in these so called ‘chav’ areas they did not regard themselves as

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/poll/2013/jul/05/katie-hopkins-judge-people-by-names-apprentice>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/2004/07/birmingham-weoley-castle>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/2004/07/birmingham-weoley-castle>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/2005/05/northfield-birmingham/>

being 'chavs'. This is perhaps not surprising, as Jones quotes a Representative of the fitness chain Gymbox as saying "[...]nobody in society would admit to being a chav; it was not a group to which people wanted to belong." (Jones, 2011, p3). Rhian E. Jones (2013) notes that the term 'chav', along with its predecessors, 'common' 'scally' and 'townie',

"[...] are used within communities to delineate internal hierarchies, based on an assumed connection between employment and respectability, rooted in a context where 'respectable' work was easier to obtain and its refusal more easily interpreted as irresponsible and dissolute" (p13-14).

Absorbing the idea that 'chavs' are the underclass rather than the working class, the participants of *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* projected the 'chav' aspect onto (other) teenagers behaving anti-socially: as Davina recalled "[...] there's a bunch of chavs walking past and they start peeing up all the walls". However, as both Owen Jones and Rhian E. Jones make clear, the terms 'chav' and working class have been amalgamated, meaning that many people outside of Northfield and Weoley Castle would stereotype all of the inhabitants of the areas as being 'chav's' and, therefore, would apply those derogatory stereotypes that accompany the term to all of the young people of *Shenley Academy Young REP* (Jones, 2013, p22).

Horton et al (2011) draw on Matthews who argued that "[...] in contemporary Western societies, children's encounters with their neighbourhoods are key in 'making sense of place'" (p44). How much the young people of Shenley's perception of themselves was shaped by the knowledge that their area was given the derogatory label 'chavvy' is not known, but whilst acknowledging that there was an increasing variety of students now attending Shenley (from neighbouring areas), Stephen Lane was certain that many of the young people at Shenley were aware that they were seen as coming from a deprived area:

“I have said to a year 11 student who is coming into 6th form ‘will you qualify for EMA?’<sup>38</sup> and they have turned round to me and said ‘Well I’m from Northfield aren’t I of course I will.’ and I think that speaks volumes about how some young people see themselves at this school,”. However, in their identity descriptors only one young person chose to include class, and this was Peter who included working class. This was despite me including working class origins in my own descriptor.

### ***Ethnicity***

There is also a widely held perception that members of the white working class are more racist than other classes (Jones, 2011, p243). The picture is of course much more complicated. As I have discussed earlier class and ethnicity are often interlinked, and the working class is significantly more ethnically diverse than any other class (Bennett, 2009, p199; Jones, 2011, p243). However, there is also the reality that some people who are white working class have, through the demonization of white working class culture and a belief that they are competing with BAME groups for resources, developed a notion of white working class pride which is seized upon by the BNP to encourage racist beliefs (Jones, 2011, p225). Although the Northfield constituency is a marginal seat between Labour and the Conservatives it has been targeted<sup>39</sup> by The British National Party<sup>40</sup>, who gained 5% of the Northfield vote in the 2010 General Election compared to a national average of 1.9%<sup>41</sup>. Initiatives such as the Northfield Anti-Racism Project<sup>42</sup> as part of the Birmingham Young People’s project have been praised for tackling the very real issues of racism in some parts of Northfield. However, racism was not something that I witnessed

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<sup>38</sup> EMA refers to Education Maintenance Allowance which is a benefit paid to students aged 16-19 year olds who live in a household that has a low income who have left, or are about to leave, compulsory education and are carrying on with their studies. It is still available to students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but in October 2010 the government announced the closure of the benefit for students in England.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.bnp.org.uk/category/social-tags/northfield>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.birminghampost.net/news/west-midlands-news/2006/04/04/bnp-anti-islam-bid-for-council-seats-65233-16900842/>

<sup>41</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/>

<sup>42</sup> <http://urbact.eu/fr/projects/active-inclusion/my-generation/our-outputs/>

during my field work at Shenley Academy, and the Academies monitoring Report in 2010 noted that, “[...] racial harmony is an important strength in this multiracial school.”<sup>43</sup>.

Twelve of the fifteen *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* questionnaire respondents selected their ethnicity as white British, with one selecting black African, one opting to not have it recorded and one missing response. During this part of the questionnaire several of the young people asked me how to fill out this section. Several thought they needed to select something from each sub box (i.e. one of the options under white which included British, Irish, Polish, any other and then *also* one from black which included African, Caribbean or any other, and so forth), and I had to explain that they just needed to select one. As I had followed a fairly standard format for presenting these options, this demonstrated to me that they may not have had to fill many of these out before, and this is probably due to their age. However, it also prompts questions around their awareness of their own ethnicity, as none of the young people in the same age bracket at *Small Heath* asked me this. This could correlate with sociologist Steven Garner’s (2007) point that whiteness is often seen as a *raceless* state (p4, p36 and p37). One young person was entirely unsure as to what his ethnicity was, and was beginning to get a little upset. As I am not aware of his family background, and certainly would not want to impose my own presumption of ethnicity onto him, I offered that he could select ‘prefer not to say’ or simply write ‘Don’t Know’ and this would be fine. I did not gather demographic data for the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* as a whole, as the *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* became my primary focus. However, I did ask those who partook in the group interview to write Identity Descriptors.

In their descriptors, the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* members Rory and Jamie included the description white, Peter said he was “Caucasian with ginger hair. I have Irish,

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<sup>43</sup> Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Shenley Academy 361983 Ofsted 3rd November 2010

Scottish and English family backgrounds”, and Trent stated that he was “Full British”. Three of the *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* members referred to themselves as white, and two did not specify an ethnicity. Khendal did not choose to specify an ethnicity in his identity descriptor, and although it is entirely possible he would be linked to the questionnaire response of ‘black African’ I have not included this in his descriptor, both because I do not think it appropriate to impose my own description of their ethnicity on to people and because I think it might be significant that he chose not to include it. Going to school in a predominantly white environment and in an area where there are BNP supporters may have affected Khendal’s choice as to which parts of his identity he was keen to focus on, or it may simply be that he does not identify himself primarily by his ethnicity (Hall, 2003, p237; Radhakrishnan, 2003, p129; Gunaratnam, 2003, p31; Sen, 2007, p26)

### ***Shenley Academy Young Rep Identity***

My main focus was *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP*, although I did observe some of the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* rehearsals to gain a broader understanding of the work that The REP was undertaking with Shenley. I also facilitated a group interview with four of the *Senior Young REP*, as they had all attended for many years and worked with me when I was the Youth Theatre director. Therefore they were able to offer insight into The REP over a longer period of time than my field work alone allowed.

*Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* had around 15 to 25 members ranging from 11 to 15 years old. Of the 15 questionnaire respondents, 13 were aged 11-14 and one was 15 (and one missing response). There were nine boys and five girls (one missing response). Attendance was sporadic and fluid. Five had been attending for less than six months and three for six months to a year. However, seven had been attending between one and three years, and one person had been attending for three to four years. As I discussed above,

twelve of the questionnaire respondents selected their ethnicity as white British, one chose black African, one did not wish for it to be recorded, and there was one missing response.

Head of Drama Stephen Lane felt that the Young REP group reflected the school demographic accurately, including young people from the full range of socio-economic backgrounds in the school catchment area including the slightly more affluent areas of Harborne and Selly Oak.

Similarly to *Small Heath Young REP*, (now former) Director of Young People's Theatre Hannah Phillips was concerned that the young people identified as a school group rather than a Young REP group. Stephen Lane felt that they *did* have an identity as a Young REP group, but specifically as *Shenley Academy Young REP*, and did not connect this to a larger Young REP identity or community. I asked them to complete postcards to show people about their Young REP group. Ten of the 18 postcards referred to the group as either *Shenley Academy Young REP* or *Shenley Young REP* which demonstrated that, as Stephen Lane has described, they had a fairly strong group image as *Shenley Young REP* and not just as the school group Shenley Academy. This differed from *Small Heath Young REP* where, as discussed above, only six out of the 21 postcards had the words 'Young REP' whereas ten included the school name.



(Photograph above – *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* postcards)

Hughes & Wilson's Report highlighted 'increased happiness' as one of the outcomes of attending youth theatre, and the enjoyment that being involved in Drama and Theatre Education brings is recognised by Clifford & Hermann: "and of course, drama is fun!" (Clifford & Herrmann, 1999, p16; Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p67). The identity that *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* showed through their postcards had a strong sense of fun, with thirteen of the postcards containing smiling faces, the words fun or the expression 'ha ha ha'. This sense of fun and humour was evident both when I directed them and when I observed their rehearsals with Rhys McClelland. When devising they often created genuinely humorous performances, and Rory recalled the enjoyment of a performance from his time in the *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP*: "Yeah I can see a photo in one of the halls there's a photo of me, Dave and Jack when we was doing that performance, I remember, it was a good time. We did have a good laugh".

The importance of acceptance and team work in youth theatre was also important to the youth theatre attenders that took part in Hughes & Wilson's (2004) research (p64). *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* postcards presented a group which was friendly and welcoming: the word family was mentioned on five postcards, and during the research workshop one young person described The REP as "[...] like its one big happy family". Several postcards had pictures of people working or standing together, and the words friends, supportive and team work appeared. Four of the postcards explicitly invited people to join the group.

However, drama was only mentioned on three of the postcards, supporting Stephen Lane's observation that there were a variety of reasons that the young people attended: "Over the years we have had a number of students who have participated in The REP as an extra-curricular activity alongside students who are doing it because they want to take it to another level, they want to do something with it". This is not uncommon, and research



shows 54% of youth theatre participants attend to meet up with their friends (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p67). Most of the participants had heard of the group through teachers, friends or had seen posters around school, although they all felt it needed more publicity. The reasons for attending that the young people gave me included the enjoyment of drama, learning performance skills and something to do after school, which correlates with the reasons given by the youth theatre participants in Hughes & Wilson's (2004) research (p67). Jamie said that it was because they used to get free sandwiches. I remembered this from when I directed them as they were so popular with the young people. Stephen Lane had informed me at the time that the idea was to give them nourishment to help them concentrate in the session in case they hadn't eaten all day. The young people were not told this and seemed to just enjoy the free food, so much so that Peter recalled "People used to fight over them!", which elicited my own memories of the drama assistant and myself having to be very firm about people making an orderly queue.

## **Performance Choices**

### ***Secrets and Gardens***

The use of ensemble in drama and theatre education is advocated by many practitioners, for practical as well as deeper social reasons (Anderson *et al.*, 2009, p70). Clifford and Hermann (1999) suggest from their own experience that when working with a large group of young people the best approach is ensemble, devising small and large group scenes that are then woven together, and the use of physicality rather than elaborate set (p134). The ensemble way of working offers the practicality of holding the attention of a room of 20-30 young people, both during a workshop and over a longer rehearsal period. It also has a deeper social purpose, as Neelands & O'Conner note (2010), as participatory democracy in action:

“The ensemble provides the basis for young people to develop the complex levels of social intelligence (Gardner, 1988) needed to embrace the challenges of the future, whilst also developing the social imagination required to produce collaborative social art which reflect, energises and focuses the world for young people” (p156).

Neelands also notes in his 2010 book produced for the National Association of Youth Theatre’s, *Excellent Youth Theatre* that the process of youth theatre should always be based in ensemble (p19). The vitality of ensemble as a form is being increasingly recognised in the professional sector by high profile companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company (Neelands, 2009, p182; Neelands, 2011, p5). Govan *et al* (2007) note that devising is often related to cutting edge performances, and offers, “[...] the flexibility to enable theatre-makers to address matters of personal concern, to interrogate topical issues, and to extend the aesthetics and reception of performance” (p4).

The first performance that *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* worked on during my main field work was an ensemble devised piece as part of a festival of Young REP work. The festival took place in The REP’s studio theatre, The Door, and in order to link it to the main stage production *The Secret Garden* the theme was Secrets and Gardens. Working with the same very simple set – a garden (or rather a park) with a bench and a lamppost, each of the five groups devised their own piece around the discovery of a secret. The pieces were presented one after another to tell the story of one (very peculiar) day in the park.

Ensemble is a valid mode of theatre production in its own right, but the decision to work in this way specifically with *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* was also based on the needs of the group, which were in part due to their class background.

Stephen Lane felt that the class background of the young people did make a difference to the way they needed to be directed. He was very positive about the techniques that Rhys

McClelland used, and described a situation with one past youth theatre director who had not recognised the best way to work with the young people at Shenley Academy. He explained that the children are often disaffected and they needed to be coaxed and guided rather than told what to do. Youth theatre using the ensemble devised process inherently lends itself to this, as Neelands (2010) notes:

“Youth theatres have a particular method of learning which is distinct from formal education. Youth theatre practitioners lead each session knowing that young people have choices about whether to come back or not. Young people vote with their feet and if what is on offer is not what they are looking for, they will go elsewhere. This fact is particularly important in terms of hard to reach young people who may need to be offered something distinctive and enticing rather than being expected to fit into existing programmes. (p17)

Juliet Raynsford, in *Inclusive Youth Theatre*, the sister publication to *Excellent Youth Theatre*, quotes Margaret Brough of the Diversity Hub who explains that:

“With hard to reach young people you need to make a commitment. This translates as we’ve got to offer a ‘contradiction’ to what the young person has experienced before. We’ve got to give them the time, give them the resources and see things through or otherwise they will go, if all we are offering the young person is more of the same of what they’ve already had in their lives” (Margaret Brough, Diversity Hub in Raynsford, 2010, p24)

The young people highlighted the difference in the process themselves as Davina explained:

“ [Previous Youth Theatre Director] was more like you stand up, you sit down, you say your lines you do this, if you’re not on you sit there, you shut up you can’t even

try practising your line or share ideas, you just sit there, shut up let him do it. Now it's more if you're off don't sit there talking discuss ideas, don't talk about nothing. But we're rarely off now."

Her fellow Young REP participant Elisa added, "Everyone's always on stage and he [Rhys] plays games to get us warmed up for drama."

Even if the director was not 'telling them what to do' but rather using a script and a formal rehearsal process, the young people may not have responded because the style of directing was too far removed from their prior experience of drama. Raynsford (2010) draws on York Theatre's Catalyst project to note that, "Working with disenfranchised young people often requires a different approach to delivering youth theatre processes than working with young people with higher levels of self-esteem who are self-motivated. Often the pace has to be very different, and has to involve a much greater degree of youth-led process" (p34). Elisa explained to me the value of devising dialogue themselves: "It helps you remember the line as well. If it's in your own words you can remember it easier". Rhys McClelland was conscious that, although the work was led by the young people, he gave them a very supportive structure. This was in part due to their lack of confidence in allowing themselves to 'fail'. Neelands (2010), calls for more tolerance of 'failure' in youth, as failing is part of most theatres creative processes (p11). Highly successful author J K Rowling made a strong case for failure in her Harvard Commencement speech:

"It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case, you fail by default. Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way" (Rowling, June 5 2008).

However, as I discussed above, the knowledge that the area that they live in is not held in high esteem may impact on the self-esteem of the young people, and in turn explain their reluctance to allow themselves to 'fail' appropriately and Rhys McClelland's decision to scaffold them through this process.

Belfiore & Bennett draw on Roberts to explain how class and cultural participation can be linked:

"Roberts (2004) suggests that this might occur because middle and upper class parents are more likely to be involved themselves in a wide range of cultural activities, and that this early exposure might create an unconscious predisposition for the arts: 'children in middle-class homes are introduced to the widest ranges of leisure experiences [...] although school education may moderate it never obliterates the leisure effects of family background' (pp. 66–67)" (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007, p254-255).

There is very little artistic provision in or near to Northfield and Weoley Castle, and many families do not access the city centre and so will not have been able to experience the artistic provision located there. Therefore many of the young people in *Shenley Academy Young REP* will not have accessed theatre with their families. There is also a scarcity of dramatic provision at primary level, and so they will be joining the Academy with a limited amount of experience of drama or theatre. Stephen Lane felt that a playful and organic approach to rehearsals, rather than a very formal teaching of skills, was necessary to give the young people access to the art form. He drew on an example of a devised piece that I had facilitated with the (then) members of *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* when I was their youth theatre director:

“If we think about *Everyone Loves Football*, if you had scripted that and tried to teach Jamie narrating and stage business separately and then had him do them at the same time, he may have got quite frustrated because he had not had much exposure to drama at that point in his life. But by discreetly teaching those skills in a dramatic context suddenly he is making something very creative, for him, very clever, but he is not learning the elements and skills first and then applying them into dramatic contexts, he is leaning whilst he is doing.”

The devising process allowed the young people to express their personalities. The fun identity that they presented through their postcards was clearly demonstrated in their genuinely humorous devised work. It also allowed them to input specific local references, such as a supposed Birmingham City Football Club fan whose embarrassing secret was that he was actually an Aston Villa Fan.

## **Relationship to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre**

### ***With a Building***

As with *Small Heath Young REP*, the intention behind establishing a youth theatre at Shenley Academy was to remove some of the barriers to accessing the theatre and the youth theatre provision based at the theatre. Although they were based at their school, the group had performed in the studio theatre at The REP several times. As audience members the school took them on trips to the theatre, and several of the older members were beginning to access the theatre more independently. Consequently, many of the young people had a connection to the building. However, it could have been stronger and all parties were keen to enhance it.

Accessing the theatre for the young people was difficult, in part because of their geographical location. The school is seven miles - a forty minute bus journey - from the theatre, as Stephen Lane explained: “[...]we are at the edge of the city, we’re not an inner

city, I know we're not rural, but you haven't got to go very far before you realise there's a big massive countryside, so we are right at the edge of the city". The young people also stated that the distance was prohibitive; Morgan explained, "It's easier to just go from lesson, to REP to home....I probably wouldn't have gone if it wasn't here.....It's too far away, too hard to get there". The younger students also explained that they would not be allowed to travel alone, and would have needed parental accompaniment. Earlier in the group interview the young people had spoken freely about their experience of crime in the local area, and alongside thefts and anti-social behaviour Davina had said "Chav and Emo<sup>44</sup> arguments are scary as hell, they pull out knives!". Although fear of crime is often disproportionate to the reality, according to the British Crime Survey working class people are more likely to be the victims of crime than other classes. Owen Jones states, "with so little hope for so many young people, how can anybody be surprised at the prevalence of anti-social behaviour in many deprived, working class communities?" (Jones, 2011, p211). Therefore, parental fear of crime can lead to a reluctance to allow their children to travel independently, which would make it much more difficult for young people at Shenley Academy to access the theatre (Leverett, 2011, p14). Trent was certain he would not have attended the Young REP if it was not at his school: "No I think I enjoyed The REP as it was like on the doorstep instead of like going out of the whole environment into something else, so no.". Jamie noted that it would have taken much more effort and commitment to have gone to The REP: "I think if it was like at The REP there'd have to be something more, something else that actually wanted me to go. There would need to be something else that would like wow me for me to go on a bus all the way to town".

## Class

The extra motivation, especially initially, to have gone into the centre of Birmingham into a different environment would probably have required a prior understanding and knowledge

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<sup>44</sup> Emo is a term used to describe fans of a certain type of music who dress in a specific style.

of theatre that most of the young people at Shenley Academy had not acquired as part of their cultural capital (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7). Many of the young people were not familiar with The REP before they joined Young REP, as Stephen lane explained: “I think academy wide students maybe not aware of what Birmingham has to offer artistically and creatively, theatrically, but Young REP members definitely, particularly the long attenders, the ones who have been going quite a lot.”. When I asked if they would have joined Young REP if it was only available in the centre of Birmingham, none of the young people thought they would have. Elisa Replied, “Probably not because I wouldn’t actually know about it”. Rory felt the same, “I wouldn’t have recognised it, wouldn’t have approached it”, and Peter agreed, “it wouldn’t have crossed my mind really”.

### Cost

Cost of activities and transport can be a prohibitive factor for young people from working class backgrounds to participate in activities (Morrow, 2011, p66; Leverett, 2011, p16). The members of *Shenley Academy Young REP* do not have to pay to attend, as the cost is met by the school. Khendal asked if they charged for the central groups, and explained that he had left the youth theatre Stagecoach as it was too expensive (around £300 a term), citing money as a reason for not attending groups based in the centre of Birmingham, “It’s good because it means we can get involved without paying, it’s good.”. Steve Ball reflected that some schools that have hosted Young REP groups have opted to ask young people to pay £1 per session, and the money is then added to the production budgets. The rationale behind this is that paying for something can give it higher status in the mind of the participants. It is hoped that asking for £1 would not be too prohibitive. If young people were unable to pay they would still be allowed to attend if they discussed it with their teacher or youth theatre director. Other schools, including Shenley Academy, have decided that even £1 would be too prohibitive, and so have not asked the young people to pay it.



## Perception

Harland *et al's* (1995) research showed that amongst many young people there was an attitude that , “[...] the arts were for ‘snobs’ and ‘not for my class’” (p29). Although the young people who attended Young REP at Shenley were happy to take part in youth theatre at their own school, they demonstrated preconceived ideas about what the young people who attended the centrally based groups would be like, alongside a lack of confidence in their own abilities in comparison:

Trent: I think if people attend The REP they actually want to be actors, however if you’re just doing it for fun, like it would be a bit awkward like because they would have higher intentions.

Peter: And probably think I’m not doing my part for the group, you’d probably think that they hate you or something, or dislike you.

Jamie: It’s kind of like the stereotype kind of thing of people who do theatre are a bit posh

Jamie: And they’re really good. To go to the actual REP you have to be really good whereas...

Rory: They might look down on you and think oh yeah, you’re just a wannabe or something

Although the centrally based Young REP groups require no audition, the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* members imagined them to be more talented than they are and afforded them a higher status to themselves. The fear of what other people at the central groups would think of them was demonstrated by several of the young people. Although Elisa thought meeting new friends would be a good reason to join the central Young REP groups, most of the other young people saw this as a barrier. Davina was adamant that her

shyness and fear of being bullied would make meeting new people too difficult, especially as she felt they would all already know each other, and Rory saw the fact that “You didn’t have to meet new people” as a positive reason for having the Young REP at their school.

### **Theatre architecture**

The perception of the arts and theatre as being for people from different backgrounds to themselves means that entering cultural buildings can be daunting for young people from working class backgrounds:

“The intensely local geography of young urban dwellers, especially young men, has two dimensions. The first is the exclusion –and powerful *sense* of exclusion – from the freedom of the city.....living in a zone marked above all by its lack of cultural capital – an area seen by others as a cultural wasteland (Collins 2004; Ackroyd 2001: 539-42) – to enter spaces filled with cultural capital, such as the West End or City of London, can be an extremely intimidating act.” (Gidley, 2007, p151).

Weoley Castle and Northfield are perceived by many people both on the outside and from within as being cultural wastelands, and thus for the young people from these areas to walk into a building like The REP could be as intimidating as Gidley’s above description of the West End.

Theatre historian McAuley (1999) asserts that “the location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally” (p46). The REP was relocated to Broad Street in 1971 to be part of the civic centre, in a conscious attempt by the council to raise its status. Reflecting upon building the theatre, the architect Graham Winteringham noted that he wanted to make a distinctive statement, and that “I hoped it was going to be a very important building” (Graham Winteringham oral history REP 100 project). However, Nicholson draws on Lefebvre to explain that the unintended result of modern architecture can be that the impact is

visually striking, but it lacks a depth that resonates with the public (Lefebvre, 1991, p106 in Nicholson, 2011, p64). Khendal expressed his knowledge of The REP before he joined *Shenley Academy Young REP* as “All I thought was it was a big theatre when you entered town and that’s all I thought.” Tuan argues that architecture is designed to clarify social roles and relationships, and the (now former) Associate Producer (BAMETI) explained the perception that the building has to some people:

“[...] mainly Afro-Caribbean artists say the problems are it’s a big white hard building in the middle of town and then on different levels that it looks grand, it looks a bit posh, it’s a bit off putting. And then that comes down to socio-economic things so not necessarily ethnic background at all, it’s class”.

When I asked for some of the young people to come to the steering group at the theatre Khendal showed interest but was unsure, and approached myself and Rhys McClelland at the bus stop to ask some questions about it. He seemed eager but anxious, and wanted to know exactly what it would involve, asking that if he rang The REP to say he was going would there be more than one Rhys? He did not attend the steering group on the day. He also wanted to know how his parents would get tickets for the upcoming performance of *Secrets and Gardens* at The Door.

The presence of the theatre within the school was seen by the young people to provide a link that they would not have otherwise had, William explained, “because the only reason I sort of came here is because my drama teacher sort of suggested it, so if my drama teacher hadn’t suggested it this one I probably wouldn’t have gone there as I wouldn’t have been here now”. Peter said, “It brings The REP that one step closer”, and Jamie agreed: “It’s kind of like a stepping stone from school drama to professional theatre”.

The young people were positive about the theatre building, and 13 of the 14 questionnaire responses agreed or strongly agreed with the statements 'I felt comfortable going to The REP theatre', and one neither agreed nor disagreed (one missing response). 13 respondents disagreed with the statement 'The REP theatre was not a welcoming building' with one neither agreeing or disagreeing (and one missing response).

They demonstrated that they placed a value on the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and Jamie gave a clear example: "When you think Birmingham you think like the NIA, The REP, Bull Ring. And kind of like to be part of something that's that big in Birmingham, it's quite good". Peter felt that, "[...] the school itself I think because it's a proud thing to be part of The REP, to be in touch with it and stuff". The 2011 Ofsted Report highlighted the positive nature of the school's relationship with The REP, crediting it with increasing the number of students taking part in extra-curricular activities. (Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Shenley Academy 361983 Ofsted 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2010).

### **As Audience Members**

The relationship to the theatre as audience members varied. When given the statement 'I went to see theatre at The REP', five young people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, eight agreed or strongly agreed with it, and one neither agreed nor disagreed (and one missing response). Some of the young people I interviewed expressed having gone to the theatre with their families, and gave examples including *A Christmas Carol* and *Secret Garden*. These were both Christmas shows, which the (now former) Associate producer (BAMETI) saw as an important way of encouraging a wide range of people to access the theatre:

"It's the one time of the year that at Christmas we should be putting on a piece of work that really is indiscriminate, that should be all about the very basics of being.... You know a family show, which is good quality that maybe is a story that

hits across any culture, that's got music in it, maybe a mix bag of things that everybody can come along, connect with it and access because it's that time of year when people do make an effort to go out".

Stephen Lane was pleased that the older Young REP members were accessing the theatre more often and more independently, taking up offers such as Northfield Nights (a cheap ticket initiative). Cost was seen as being prohibitive, as Peter said: "It's expensive though isn't it? Especially at The REP it's quite expensive". I asked them if they had ever used their Young REP discount, to which Jamie Replied, "I think we did go once but they said you can't get discount", and Peter added, "Cos we weren't on the list". If this anecdote was correctly recalled, it seems ironic that working class teenage boys trying to access a theatre would be turned away when so many people in theatre settings are trying to engage the very same kind of 'hard to reach' young people. However, the common perception of young people as trouble, especially working class young people, may have caused the box office staff to have felt reluctant to engage with these teenagers entering their theatre space (Valentine *et al.*, 1998, p4). When reflecting on this with Steve Ball, however, he felt that given his own knowledge of the box office staff, this would be an unlikely reaction from them.

### **As performers**

*Shenley Academy Young REP* had performed in *The Door* four times and twelve out of fifteen questionnaire respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I have performed at The REP theatre', with two disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (one missing response). These performances were given as examples by most of the young people as their outstanding memories of being part of the Young REP. When I gave five of the young people the chance to take photographs before the theatre closed, the member who had been attending longest was very keen to take pictures of places he remembered from past performances, and several times exclaimed how much he would miss the theatre when it

was closed. The pictures were taken during the technical rehearsals for *Secrets and Gardens*, and so we were able to access backstage, the stage and front of house. They photographed the stage, the lighting box, the stairways and corridors, stage door and the stage door area, the auditorium doors and front of house area, the front of the building and neighbouring Symphony Hall. They also wanted to photograph the wardrobe department but it was not accessible.



(Photograph above - taken by *Shenley Academy Young REP* in *The Door*, with the set of *Secrets and Gardens*, at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre December 2010)

McAuley (1999) notes that, “The frame constituted by a particular building or venue is not something fixed and immutable but a dynamic and continually evolving social entity” (p41). The perception of a building is dependent on how it is experienced. At the steering group Elisa described her feelings about the theatre as being based on her past and future experiences of performing there, “I like it and like coming up to a performance that you’re performing actually at The REP, you look and you think, I’m gonna be there soon.” In contrast, *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* member Robert had not performed at the theatre, and he had a more distanced relationship to the building:

“[...] if I am on the way to town on the bus, I will look to my left on the bus and think ‘oh I am a part of that actually’ but I don’t know what it was like in the past for our school if we was to meet here or wherever because we haven’t been in The REP for long, but, at the moment, because it’s just we do it, in our lesson time, I mean I know that helps our A-Level, but it just feels like it is a slight extension of what we’re doing, it’s not like, we don’t come here very often.”

The drama research workshop also showed that the young people had a mixed relationship with the theatre building. When I placed the chair in the centre of the room and said ‘I am the Birmingham Repertory Theatre’, Khendal was quick to step forward and place himself as an actor into the picture,

Khendal: I am an actor at the Birmingham REP theatre. Can I sit on the chair?

Natalie: If you want to sit on the chair

*He lounges on the chair. There is a pause*

Khendal: I’m acting by the way

The other young people joined in to offer: “I’m the director of the play, I’m in the audience, I’m the lighting, Bing!, I’m the audience, I’m selling tickets, I’m the microphone, I’m selling food, I’m buying the food, I’m the receptionist, I’m buying tickets, I’m the lighting supervisor, I’m a prop.”. They presented some general theatrical roles, and those who were not as sure (newer members) took the lead from those who were more confident by offering, ‘I’m also in the audience’ or ‘I’m the person -buying -ticket’s friend’. They were aware of some roles within the theatre but not that many. This could be because when they were at the theatre for performances the time pressures did not allow for a proper backstage tour, as Stephen Lane explained: “In you go, there’s your dressing room, tech in

15 minutes, tech, tech, tech, tech tech [he would like to see] let's have you in for the day, here's how a theatre works – this is responsible for this, this for that”.

I placed the photographs they had taken around the room and asked the young people to go to the picture they most identified with. Then, with the other young people who had chosen the same photograph, I asked them to make sculptural representations of it and choose a corresponding emotion. All of the groups created sculptures which related to their specific experiences at The REP. Geographer Tim Cresswell draws on Casey to explain the relationship between memory and place:

“It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favour and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place –oriented or at least place-supported’ “(Casey, 1987, p186-187 cited in Cresswell, 2004, p86).

The importance of their memories to their relationship with the theatre was evident from all the group sculptures. Massey (2005) notes that, “Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (p9). This definition of space was clearly presented by the young people in the research workshop. The group that chose the foyer said it was made of bright colours as it was full of happy memories; another group chose the doors to the stage and added a moving element. They explained their sculpture as follows:

John: William was holding a balloon with confetti in it, the confetti is obviously excitement and when the door opened it all burst out because all the excitement is let out, we've been excited for so long.

Natalie: What is he excited for?



John:               The show. And the door is like you know out of Narnia, do you know the wardrobe? It's like that because you open it and its all adventures.

They were able to vividly show and describe the feelings that they had before performing, and the exciting potential that it offered them.

A third group chose the picture of the stage with the *Secrets and Gardens* set on it, and presented performing a scene. The other groups immediately recognised the scene as being from *Secrets and Gardens*. The emotion they chose was happiness, but with some fear. Contrastingly, another group chose a picture of the dressing rooms and themselves lying around being bored, which was quickly identified by other group members as they recognised the feelings from their own experiences. Doreen Massey (2005) describes Space as “[...] the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions” (p9). The interrelations and interactions that the young people had experienced at The REP had affected their perception of it as a space, and for one group this led to a very practical interpretation of what was missing from The REP pictures, “Something for us to do when we weren’t performing and no drinks ‘cos we got a bit thirsty”.

When I interviewed the members of *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP*, it was clear they had also enjoyed the performances that took place away from school premises. They referred to the two times they had performed in The Door (*Aladdin* 2007 and a modern version of Ibsen’s *The League of Youth* 2006 when I was directing them) and when they had participated in a large site specific street performance of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* when I was directing them. However, Trent explained that although he had enjoyed the performances he felt that they were not frequent enough, and the relationship with the theatre was still distant: “I think it was good, but like two performances in 5 years considering it’s based to do with The REP I think that was pretty bad, but it was a good experience but it felt more uncomfortable because we weren’t used to going to The REP.”.

Jamie remembered that the only time they were able to rehearse at the building (rather than for technical rehearsals) was *Aladdin* in 2007. They discussed how once again they felt uncomfortable in the theatre and not accepted by the staff:

Jamie: It was kind of like we was naughty school children, running around and they were kind of like a bit angry with us.

Natalie: What the staff there?

Rory: Because they didn't know you

Jamie: It sounds funny but it's kind of like...

Peter: Stereotype

Rory: Yeah

Jamie: You felt, not like you shouldn't be there, but...

Trent: But you weren't as professional as the people around

The young people were all keen to perform at The REP more, and if possible to rehearse there as well, as Davina explained:

"I do think it's better when we're at The REP though because when we're at school it's still the whole 'it's school' we're in school, it's still embarrassing when someone you know has been at another club and walked past but when we're at The REP we don't have that and it's just more, it feels like professional".

Khendal thought the best way to solve the problem of transportation was for them to all be taken there by school or by The REP. However, William was very aware of the professional nature of the theatre building, "I think the other thing would be if we were rehearsing and then there was a performance that night if we were disturbing them or they're disturbing

us". He brings up the valid point that, for all the desire to open up theatre buildings to young people, they ultimately have the job of putting on a production, and that does create certain logistical and practical issues. As McAuley (1999) notes, "The theatre space is divided; it is a place of employment for some, a place of entertainment and cultural enrichment for others." (p25-26)

However, Hannah Phillips told me during my interview with her on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011 that she would have been concentrating on bringing the young people from *Shenley* and *Small Heath* into the theatre but for the fact that the building was then closing for two years. Rhys McClelland was concerned that the young people at *Shenley Academy Young REP* did not have much of an affinity with the building because of this lack of access. The (now former) Community Engagement Officer was positive about the Satellite groups from an access perspective:

"I think the idea of satellite youth theatre's is a really good one because I think particularly in those two areas, in Shenley and in Small Heath that you would be less likely to get all of those kids to come into a building base. So if it's about access, then I agree with it, I think it's a really good idea."

However she also felt that it needed to be more of a stepping stone than it currently was, "If somebody would rather be coming to the Saturday youth theatre who happens to attend Shenley School, then bring it on. If you've got a sense that that group of people don't need to rely on that building, as in their school, to engage, rethink about that." This feeling was also verbalised by the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* members I spoke to:

Peter: It could have been a lot closer, I mean the way it is, Young REP was as you say a stepping stone into going to acting, so there had to be another stepping stone where you got into The REP, do you know what I mean?

Like in football you have your Sunday league team and then you have professional teams that come and watch you and you get asked to come over, so if we had like people from The REP spotting and stuff, and realising talent and bringing them over.

Jamie: It felt like we were quite isolated 'cos this was your [referring to when I was their youth theatre director] little Young REP group, so like we had Natalie that was doing this one, there was no-one else that came and shown interest in like the talent that we had or what we was working on.

Peter: I feel a bit confused with like the whole, there's the Young REP and then you had Birmingham REP's Young REP which was actually based at The REP, so it was like that confusion there. When you used to tell people we go to Young REP, they'd assume you went to that one. So these REPs aren't as big.

Jamie: It doesn't feel as official as Birmingham Young REP

Natalie: That's interesting. How would you describe the relationship then to The REP? Do you feel like it's a close relationship?

Trent: I think it's a little distant. It's more to do with Shenley than The REP

Peter: It's a formal relationship

### ***Without a Building***

Rhys McClelland was certain that the young people at *Shenley Academy Young REP*, like those from *Small Heath Young REP* would not notice when the theatre was closed for refurbishment as part of the new library project. However, unlike Small Heath they notice when it came time for their 'usual' performance slot, "The first time that they'll notice will

be next Christmas when *Shenley* can't perform in the festival, because that's the only time". When I presented them with the line of continuum *Birmingham REP theatre being closed will be a disaster* at one end and *The theatre being closed will be an opportunity* at the other, most of the participants stayed in the middle, seemingly unsure. However two went to the end where *it would be a disaster*. However, when I asked them to place themselves on the continuum between, *The REP is a theatre building* and *The REP has a life of its own*, all of the participants chose *The REP has a life of its own*. The majority also chose to stand by the statement *Theatre can happen anywhere*. Similarly, they all agreed in the questionnaires (apart from one missing response) that 'The REP still has an identity without a building'. During the research workshop we asked them to make a still image of what was missing from the photographs that they had taken at The REP. The human element of the theatre was evident in all of the images. Two groups chose people as the missing element. John explained his group's image: "The thing that we thought was missing was that in all the photos there was no actors."; Elisa described hers: "People involved like the directors, actors and sound people". Analogous to *Small Heath Young REP's* reaction, *Shenley Academy Young REP* were accustomed to the theatre being brought into their school by their youth theatre director, and so were already open to the idea of theatre being more than just the building that it takes place in (McAuley, 1999, p3).

At the end of the research workshop I placed the chair back into the centre and asked them to create a picture of The REP without a building, and Elisa immediately stepped in with "I'm part of the Young REP", and was joined by Morgan, "I am the director of the Young REP", and later on another participant offered "I am part of the Young REP". The positioning of themselves as a vital part of The REP without a building, along with 13 respondents agreeing with the questionnaire statement 'The Young REP is important to The REP', suggests that at least some of the members of *Shenley Academy Young REP* feel like an important part of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Other offers demonstrated

knowledge of the economic realities for some people, including out of work actors, someone begging for opportunities, and a builder. Whilst one young person was 'Looking at the building, fed up', two others were looking at lists of the other places to go to see REP productions whilst it was closed.

### ***An In-between Zone***

*William, "It's sort of being in-between at school, being a member of Shenley and being a member of Young REP whereas if you're in your own clothes it's definitely REP otherwise it's sort of in-between."*

The young people all agreed that having the Young REP at their school made it much more accessible to them, and despite ideally wanting to rehearse at the theatre they felt that atmosphere in the drama studio was different during Young REP rehearsals from school lessons. As Elisa noted, "if I was in that room in a drama lesson it would feel different than being in it now, I don't know it just feels different", and Khendal agreed that it was "nothing the same". This chimes with Nicholson's (2011) point (drawing on Lefebvre) that the meanings held within space are in a constant state of negotiation through interaction (p11).

The young people identified the presence of other people in drama lessons who did not want to work, and teachers that were assessing you, as both being responsible for affecting the atmosphere in the room. However, like William above, they also noted that being in uniform was a hindrance to really feeling separate from their school identity:

Natalie:           What does being in uniform mean?

Audric:            It's all school stuff. It's just school.

Danielle:           When you're in your school uniform you're like you yourself the school student, but when you're at home in your own clothes it's almost like if

you're wearing something different you're a different person. So like if I came in dressed in like tracksuit or a top I would feel different I would be able to act different as if I came in in like jeans and a hoodie or something.

The change in function of the room from school class to rehearsal studio, alongside the involvement in performance and play, creates a liminal space which the young people themselves have picked up on (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p69; Horvath *et al.*, 2009; Schechner, 2002, p45). This liminality allows them to link their own school rehearsal room directly to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. When we asked them in the research workshop what was missing from The REP photographs, one group said:

William: We felt that Shenley was missing

Khendal: Us

William: This room. Us being there, Shenley Academy

Khendal: And Shenley from the start to the end

Rhys: So the process of making the play was here and then it went there and existed there on the day. Do you agree with that?

*Agreement*

## **Conclusion**

The ethical choice made by the Learning & Participation department at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre to establish a Young REP group at Shenley Academy, and the ethical choices regarding performance and rehearsal styles, were to a great extent affected by the socio-economic reality of the area and therefore by class. The young people of Shenley Academy faced barriers to attending the theatre which included economics, geographic location and a lack of pre-established cultural capital (Morrow, 2011, p66; Leverett, 2011,

p16; Bennett, 2009, p201; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p2). The theatre brought professional drama and performance experience into the school, and all of the social and cultural benefits that this is allied to.

Due to the limited amount of access that the young people had had to the theatre, their relationship to it could have been stronger, and this was something that everyone was keen to improve. However, the access that they had had to the building, through performances in *The Door*, had given the young people admittance to practitioner spaces and had allowed them to interact with the space and create memories (McAuley, 1999, p25-26; Massey, 2005, p9; Cresswell, 2004, p86). These memories had transformed the theatre from, as Khendal put it, “[...] a big theatre when you entered town and that’s all I thought” to a building in which they had had tangible experiences, including being bored, thirsty, apprehensive and excited.

In the next section through an exploration of case study 3, *14-18 Company 2*, I will explore the effect that rehearsing in the theatre building over a sustained period of time had on the relationship between a youth theatre group and the theatre.



### **Case Study Three: 14-18 Company 2**

**What kind of relationship does a youth theatre group based within a theatre have with the theatre building? In what ways do ethnicity and class impact on the accessibility of this group? How is this affected when the building closes for two and a half years?**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous two case studies I explored the effect that firstly ethnicity and secondly class had on how accessible a theatre building is, and the ways in which these factors influenced the aesthetic and ethical choices of The REP's youth theatre directors. This exploration of the Young REP groups based at schools in communities which would not traditionally engage with the theatre showed that bringing the Young REP to their school circumvented some barriers, and gave them opportunities to access youth theatre provision that they would not otherwise have had. It also demonstrated that performing at the theatre, even once, had a marked positive impact on their relationship to the theatre building. In this case study I will concentrate on the Young REP group *14-18 Company 2*, and by considering the class and ethnicity of the group I will continue to explore potential barriers to access for young people who are not from white, middle class backgrounds. This case study will investigate the effect that rehearsing at the theatre on a weekly basis has on a youth theatre group, and will consider how the memories that these young people built up impacted on their relationship to the theatre space. I will also discuss the impact that the two year closure of the building had on these young people and their relationship to it.

#### **Identity Descriptors**

**Natalie Hart**, I am a 31 year old white female with Celtic heritage and working class roots, drama facilitator and PhD researcher.

#### 14-18 Company 2 Young REP

**Annabel** ,17 year old, white (yet olive skinned) female. Think myself to be English – has Irish heritage as well as mish-mash of heritage deeper on my Dad’s side, dark brown eyes and hair. An aspiring actress.

**Joanna** . 15 years old, my Granddad is Welsh and my Mom’s maiden name is French. I’m white. My family background is working class and the last couple of generations I know lived in Birmingham. I love creative stuff and I hate maths.

**Parker** 13 years old, my Mum is from Manchester and Dad is from Somerset but I have been brought up in a West Indian and Asian community! Also I would say I am interested in the backstage side of theatre!

**Daniel**, I am 14 years old, I come from an English/Indian background. I’m interested in music and drama and would have a career in that sort of thing.

**Eve**, 18 year old, white grammar school leaver, struggling through her A-levels, only one hand, going to drama school in September.

#### REP Staff

**Steve Ball**, I am a 52 year old white urban theatre professional gay father

**Hannah Phillips**, 33 year old Queer female with Jewish heritage. Theatre maker, lecturer and facilitator

**Rhys McClelland** , 33 year old white male with Celtic heritage and working class roots, youth theatre director and passionate learner

**Associate Producer (BAMETI)**, I am a 30 year old Welsh, mixed race female to a black Jamaican father and white, Welsh mother, heterosexual, university graduate with working class roots who has a senior management role in theatre.

## **Group identity**

### ***Origins of 14-18 Company 2 Young REP***

*14-18 Company 2* was set up in September 2010 by (now former) Director of Young People's Theatre Hannah Phillips as part of her restructuring of the youth theatre groups which met at the theatre building to rehearse, traditionally known as the central groups. The group comprised mainly of young people who had attended the previous Young REP group called *Skills*, with some members from the former Young REP group *Musicals*. Most of the young people had been attending Young REP from between two and eight years. During the group interview, *14-18 Company 2* member Parker, who had been a member of the Young REP for six years, explained the changes that he had experienced in the organisation of the groups: "[...] when I first came the groups was what it is now with the different ages and then it changed to the *Musical* group, the *Skills* group, the *Plays* group and the younger group and then Hannah Phillips changed it back to what we had before". Hannah Phillips explained during her interview the reason behind the decision to modify the groups from specific performance interests back to age groups:

"It's really important that everyone has the opportunity to have as many experiences as possible whilst they are part of the Young REP and It is too early for young people to make firm choices about what they want to do and need to be given the opportunity to explore a variety of disciplines, learn new skills and experience all the work that we do."

She also explained that by grouping the young people into closer age groups she hoped it would give them more confidence and opportunities. For example, members of the *11-13*

*Company* would previously have been with young people as old as 18, and therefore their voices could get lost and opportunities for lead roles were often taken by older members. This was also expressed during the steering group by one of the members of the *11-13 Company*: “Cos I was younger then, I wasn’t really put forward to like any of the main roles, I was just shoved kind of to the back. I really enjoy it now in the 11-13 group and I think it is a fantastic group because everyone is involved it’s not just the older ones do this and that”.

The central groups had historically met at The REP and rehearsed on Saturdays in the theatre’s rehearsal rooms. However, in the year preceding my field work the rehearsal rooms had been knocked down as part of the redevelopment of the theatre, and the groups had had to meet in several different locations. During my field work they were rehearsing in Birmingham School of Acting’s (BSA) building at Millennium Point, which was modern and had excellent facilities. The changes in location of their rehearsals had been difficult for the group, as they expressed in their group interview:

Annabel: It’s been hard in a way because we’ve left what you think is your home building for your rehearsal, in the Christmas when the rehearsal studios were knocked down that was really sad and then the *Musicals* group we moved to...

Eve: So many places...

Annabel: We had a little primary school, Nelson something, which wasn’t far from The REP so you went past it as you got to it, that was the link (group laughter) and then when we had this grotty place in eurgh, it was called Church Road and it was this disgusting building with flies

Daniel: The ceiling was coming in

Annabel: It was horrible loads of dead...

Eve: Insects

Parker: It was horrible

Annabelle: But the change of building was not that great but now we're here at BSA which is you know good facilities and there's a lot here, but I think because it's the other side of town from REP so there's that slight detachment.

The young people all paid £45 a term to attend the youth theatre, and usually performed in The Door (when the theatre was open) or at the Old Rep Theatre.

### ***Ethnicity***

Of the 18 young people who completed a questionnaire 15 identified as being white British, one as being white and Asian and two as having any other white background. I conducted a group interview with five of the young people: Eve, Joanna and Annabelle all identified themselves as white in their descriptors, although Joanna referenced French and Welsh heritage, and Annabelle Irish and a 'mish mash' on her father's side. Daniel said that he was from an English/Indian background, and Parker that his Mum is from Manchester and Dad is from Somerset but was brought up in a West Indian and Asian community.

*14-18 Company 2*, like the other central Young REP groups, was not representative of Birmingham in terms of ethnicity, and this was something that The REP staff and many of the young people themselves were aware of and keen to change. Hannah Phillips noted in our first interview: "Currently I don't think the Young REP are representative of Birmingham at all. Birmingham is incredibly multicultural and that's not the case with the Young REP, our objective at the moment is to make it much more representative of the West Midlands.". Associate Director Steve Ball in our interview explained:

“It’s better than before but I know that the demographic of the Young REP isn’t representative of the demographic of the city. Now the majority of Birmingham school pupils are from BAME backgrounds, that’s not the case with the Young REP as a whole”.

He explained that they had begun to address that as a priority. Youth Theatre director Rhys McClelland also noted the disparity between Birmingham’s demographics and that of the Young REP, “Birmingham might become the first black majority city in Britain, and actually we’re far, far from becoming the first black majority youth theatre in Britain”.

The reasons for this disparity were complex and multifaceted. Dominant culture, of which theatre is a part, can exclude young people from minoritised ethnicities by simply not challenging itself and unconsciously retaining an Imperialist identity (Said, 1993, p392). Performance choices, for example, if not interrogated, as Berry (2000) explains, can exclude, marginalize and oppress:

“Perhaps for the audience, who might be male, European, white, and so forth, the content and experiences might be true. However think of the number of spectators and participants of the dramatic arts that are excluded, not just in terms of presence, but knowledge, values, histories and so forth. With each presentation of truth through the dramatic arts, interrogation includes: Whose truth? What truth? Whose interests are the truths serving? When were they constructed, by whom, at what time, and in what space? (p9-10).

The perception by some people from BAME backgrounds that theatre and the arts are for white people is tied up in complicated identity politics. The philosopher Amartya Sen (2007) highlights the importance of ‘decolonizing’ the mind, because “the colonial masters of yesterday continue to exert an enormous influence on the postcolonial mind

today”(p92). Author and social activist bell hooks (1992) notes the danger of non-black people recreating the imperial gaze if they do not rigorously reflect on their process, and also of black people feeling that they must reject their blackness to succeed. She clarifies that unless these issues are addressed there will be a crisis in black identity for those who do deny their blackness in order to participate, and those who refuse to may exclude themselves (or be excluded) from certain arenas, including the arts (p7 and p18). I witnessed an example of this complex perception of the arts when I was waiting for *14-18 Company 2*'s rehearsal to start one Saturday at BSA. The REP's new education trainee was with Rhys' group when he saw someone he knew; he was surprised to see him, and exclaimed “this is the last place I thought I'd bump into brethren from the endz, good to see you!”.

Some of the young people themselves were aware of the lack of diversity in the central Young REP groups. One member of *14-18 Company 2*, when asked what identity they aspired to for their group, said that she wanted the group to be *genuinely* diverse, as she had noticed it was very white, and that it “[...] makes us look racist”. During the steering group Eve was very vocal about the lack of diversity and the fact that it perpetuated itself:

Eve: I think at the moment, it's very much a youth theatre that is based towards white middle class background. If you look at the people here we have one person who is not white (points at Zahid from *Small Heath Young REP*, laughs) Sorry, to be blunt!

Zahid: Its ok, happens sometimes

Eve: But it's the majority of people in our group, there are about 2 or 3 people who have ethnic origin. The same goes with disabilities, there was one person in my group who had autism last year, and I have one hand and that's about it. I think we might be cutting off people that want to get involved with us.

Parker: I would agree with that. Possibly in the future we want say The REP's identity to maybe be something like diverse, so we have mixtures of everything.

This conversation was raised again by Parker and Eve during the group interview:

Parker: It seems to be mainly all white people here. Birmingham's meant to be one of the first cities in Britain to be mostly... and it just seems we should be more culturally diverse...

Eve: My best friend is in 16-25 and she's the only 'brown' girl in her group and she does feel a bit odd. It's like they're all white, all white middle class and she used to live in Balsall Heath or something.

Parker: I've got a mate who is in 6<sup>th</sup> form at my school and he came to The REP, he was in *Musicals*, big, big black guy and he said he felt really like the odd one out and didn't like it so he left.

As I have previously discussed, leisure pursuits are often influenced by what is handed down from one generation to the next, and thus ethnicity and class can greatly affect whether young people approach the arts as a pursuit they see as being 'for them' (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p37). Francois Matarasso (1999) points out the balancing act of empowering marginalised groups but not alienating established communities of interest (p37), and cultural critic Henry Giroux (1997) addresses the important issue of educating white young people in anti-racist theories whilst not disempowering them, asking:

"What are the educational and political stakes in rearticulating 'whiteness' in anti-essentialist terms so that white youth can understand and struggle against the long legacy of white racism while using the particularities of 'their own cultures as a resource for resistance, reflection and empowerment?" (p91).



The perception of artistic product as predominantly white misunderstands the complexity of much culture, and the impact that non-white artists have had in the sector both in the mainstream and subversively (Valentine *et al.*, 1998, p20-21; Pannayiotou in Appignanesi, 2010, p1; Gidley, 2007, p144). The privilege of whiteness is often invisible, and some young people felt that if BAME young people did not want to join then there was nothing that they could do about it (Garner, 2007, p5). This sparked an interesting debate during the Steering Group between Eve from *14-18 Company 2* and Dave and Tim from *14-18 Company 1*, which brought up the complexities of engaging with diverse young people whilst not disenfranchising the existing white, middle class members of the Young REP:

Eve: [...]If it looks like we're not inclusive then they're not going to want to go there they're gonna want to go to someplace else, they're going to want to go to Stage 2 or BSA because they look like they are more inclusive it is the way we are showing ourselves and presenting ourselves...

Tim: I think then in that case it's sort of a balance issue, getting the balance right between are we going to actively seek out you know ethnic minorities and people with disabilities and people of all sorts who fit into all of these different categories at the same time providing a theatre experience for everybody.

Dave: Making the group more diverse I don't think you can go round actively seeking ethnic minorities or whatever because then that's like making it harder for people who have been on the waiting list, who are white and middle class, I don't know how you can really change that, because I mean it's like a snow ball effect, because white middle class people are joining because it looks like a white middle class group, how do you change that?

Hannah Phillips was keen to challenge the central group's perception of theatre and

performance and introduce them to more diversity of form and content.

There was significant momentum from the Learning and Participation (L&P) team to address the current demographics of the group, and as the (now former) Community Engagement Officer noted, “I think Hannah Phillips’s very much on the case with looking into how we can change that around”. Neelands (2010) notes in the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) document, *Excellent Youth Theatre*, that NAYT’s values of access and entitlement:

“[...] carry with them the responsibility for registered youth theatres to do all they can to attract and include young people, rather than expect under-represented groups to come to them. This puts an onus on youth theatres to have active strategies for widening participation.”(p8)

Whilst recognising the complexities of doing this, Hannah Phillips explained to me during her interview and over the course of my field work the strategies for diversifying the Young REP. This included turning the waiting list into a database, doubling the provision, outreach work, changing the style and content of the work produced to make it more exciting and accessible, looking at the branding of the Young REP and encouraging more opportunities for the young people to have their voices heard.

### ***Class***

As I have explored in the previous case study, class plays a role in how accessible the Young REP and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre is for young people. The central Young REP groups, as well as being majority white, were also acknowledged as being majority middle class. Hannah Phillips described *14-18 Company 2* as “[...] predominantly white, middle class, predominantly female, young people. A lot of which are coming from private school education and quite privileged backgrounds”. Reflecting on this case study, Steve Ball felt that more of the young people were from the non-fee paying grammar schools of King

Edward VI rather than the private King Edward VI or Edgbaston High School, although pupils of these schools were also present. Rhys McClelland, as someone from outside of Birmingham, had noticed the lack of 'Brummie' accents in the youth theatre: "I know it's strange to go by accents because there are a lot of native Birmingham people in the Young REP, but it's not a Brummie Youth theatre is it?". The central groups had inadvertently privileged middle class children by simply not being proactive in their strategies for recruitment. As it was a very popular youth theatre they had set up a waiting list, which although seemingly fair (wait your turn) prioritised those children from backgrounds with cultural capital, whose parents were aware of The REP and it's youth theatre and enthusiastic enough about theatre to put their children on a waiting list very early (Bennett, 2009, p13; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7). *14-18 Company 2* member Eve identified the lack of publicity as being a problem which kept the Young REP middle class:

"The majority of people who go and see theatre at The REP are white middle class people and that is how they find out about The REP and that's how they go on the website and find out about youth theatre and I think the Young REP has a responsibility to start with distribution and target people in different societies to get a more diverse range of people, because theatre is supposed to reflect life in society, if we don't have such a range of diverse people in theatre then you are not going to be exploring the whole range of life".

In the literature review section on class I discussed the importance of class in access to public life, and the significance of culture to class politics is asserted by the political writer Rhian E. Jones (2013) :

"Indeed, given the alteration of the political and economic milieu over the past two decades, and the weakening hold of party and ideological ties as credible means of

asserting opposition, the ways in which cultural space is occupied can hold as much if not more significance than the physical occupation of public space” (p2).

She highlights the fact that working class people are increasingly excluded from most positions of real power and influence, and the implications that this has in terms of social mobility, equality and working class people having a real voice (Jones, 2013, p86). The REP were again being very proactive about changing the class dynamics of the youth theatre through outreach because, as Hannah Phillips noted, “I think it has huge implications that The REP is seen as a middle class venue and the Young REP has that feeling of middle class values.”

#### ***14-18 Company 2 Young Rep Identity***

The group was made up of 14 girls and four boys. Seven participants were aged 14 and eleven were aged 15-17. They had all attended for a significant period of time, with nine attending for more than five years, eight between two and four years and only one person for one to two years. No one had been a member for less than a year. Hannah Phillips explained to me that as many of them had been attending since they were eight, they had grown up in the Young REP, and it was intrinsic to their lives. She felt that this gave them a strong connection with the youth theatre – however, it also made it difficult for her to diversify the group by introducing new people, as it was hard to penetrate the strong bonds that they had. As Sen (2007) notes, a “[...] sense of identity can firmly exclude many people even as it warmly embraces others”(p2). This was exemplified in the anecdotes that Eve and Parker gave about young people trying to join but feeling excluded, and a comment by one member of *14-18 Company 2* that not everyone had made her feel welcome when she joined.

They were conscious of having a mixed identity due to being an amalgamation of two previous groups which had had very strong identities – *Skills* and *Musicals*. Hannah Phillips

described them as a highly skilled group who were very exciting and dynamic to work with. However, as *Skills* had historically had more time and resources than the other groups, those young people regarded themselves and were perceived by the other central groups as superior. Hannah Phillips was keen to avoid the perpetuation of hierarchies, and part of challenging this was to ensure that all of the groups were given equal time and resources. Hannah Phillips was also aware that they needed to come up with a better name than *14-18 Company 2*. She wanted them to develop with their own name and branding, and in order to explore this she created a steering group with representatives from all groups with this as a focus. When I asked them to create postcards to show the identity of their group, only one postcard referenced the group name, and it was jumbled 'Company 2/14-16'. One postcard had drawn a picture of *Skills* and *Musicals* colliding into a new word, but with a large rift down the middle. This seemed understandable given the relatively new nature of the group identity. However, considering their long association with the Young REP I was surprised that only one postcard said 'Young REP', one YR (which I took to be short for Young REP) and one The REP. When discussing their memories of the Young REP, participants used the term REP interchangeably to mean the theatre or their Young REP group. Hannah Phillips was keen to enhance the branding of the Young REP, as she felt that it could be stronger and more young-person focused.



(Photograph above - 14-18 Company 2 postcards)

Words pertaining to variety and diversity were present on seven of the postcards, although the variety and diversity may have referred to their performance skills rather than the demographics of the group, although as I discussed above one girl had said that she wanted the group to be *genuinely* diverse. Most of the postcards were trying to give across the attitude or tone of the group with words like loud, friendly, happy and humour. Some group members were keen to demonstrate the quirky nature of their group, and they used the word kookie when discussing their identity in small groups before drawing their postcards; one postcard had the word crazy and one the word bonkers.

Only four postcards referenced things to do with performance. This surprised me, as the ethos of the group was of youth theatre as a place to acquire and refine their performance skills. Rhys McClelland told me that the majority of the young people in the central groups appeared to be striving to be professional actors:

“They come to Young REP because they’re going to go to Central or East 15 and say ‘I’m going to be an actor’. Some of those people going and auditioning at five or six different drama schools, having preferences and options and desires and ambition and seem very keen on making careers in the arts”.

This assertion was supported when I asked them in their group interview why they attended Young REP. Although friends and enjoyment were mentioned, they were also positive about its relevance for an acting career. Joanna replied “I want to do acting when I’m older and I think it’s good experience”, Eve said, “I’m going to drama school in September so it was good preparation”, and Annabel explained “Cos well it’s what I want to do and it’s good training and practice”. Hannah Phillips felt that it was important to foster the Young REP as a route into a career in theatre that fostered vocational training and pathways into employment, and as Neelands notes, “Youth theatres provide an alternative route into performance experiences and careers for many young people and they do it very cheaply” (Neelands in Raynsford, 2010, p2). It could be that the performance aspect of the Young REP was so intrinsic to their experience of it that it did not occur to many of them to highlight it on their postcards.

## **Relationship to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre**

### ***With a building***

*14-18 Company 2* had a very strong relationship to the theatre building. When presented with the statement in the questionnaire ‘I do not miss The REP theatre now it is closed’ they all disagreed, with the majority strongly disagreeing (one missing response). 14 of the 18 questionnaire respondents strongly agreed that they felt comfortable going to The REP theatre and three agreed (one missing response). Apart from one missing response, all of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘The REP theatre was not a welcoming building’. They all agreed or strongly agreed that they went to see theatre at The REP and that they had performed there.

Hannah Phillips, Rhys McClelland and Steve Ball all felt that the central Young REP members had a strong relationship with the building. Hannah Phillips explained: “I think they felt very close to it because it’s been really important, a big factor in their lives”. To demonstrate

the intensity of the attachment, Rhys McClelland told me about the reaction of those young people to the closure of the building:

“There are some young people that actually when the theatre closed were distraught, very upset that this building that they grew up in was going to be inaccessible for two years. They’re very much a part of the building and they own it in a particular way”.

As I explored in the previous case study, access to the theatre’s backstage and performance space provided the members of *Shenley Academy Young REP* with memories which gave them the chance to turn space into place (McAuley, 1999, p25-26; Cresswell, 2004, p20). It is therefore logical that more sustained access to a space will build more memories, which will increase the sense of belonging; as described by Edward Relph, “to be inside a place is to belong to it and identity with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place” (Relph 1976,49 in Cresswell, 2004, p44). Steve Ball felt that the young people’s experience of rehearsing and performing at the theatre was crucial to their relationship with it:

“I think they generally feel part of the theatre, particularly when we were open and their rehearsals take part in the rehearsal studios and they have to go back stage, they have to walk down the dressing room corridor to get to the studios, I think most of them feel part of The REP and that’s a major attraction, that’s a Unique Selling Point (USP) we’ve got, that other youth theatres don’t have.”.

*14-18 Company 1* Young REP member Keenan explained during the steering group that rehearsal week was when he felt most connected to the theatre, especially now that they no longer rehearsed there:



“Before we had to start moving you got that connection constantly because you could go into the theatre space, you could practice anyway, but now that we’ve had to move out you lose it and the only time you look forward to is when you’re there every single day”.

Neelands (2010) notes that “many young people want their youth theatre to be a ‘home’ where they can safely meet and work creatively with like-minded peers” (p13). Annabel, Eve and Parker all used the word ‘homely’ to describe the theatre, and during the drama research workshop one group described their feelings about stage door as “special, like when you go home”.

Many of the young people were passionate about their relationship with the theatre building. Eve said during the steering group, “I think the atmosphere at The REP was really lovely”. The group performed carols in the foyer of The REP on the press night of *The Secret Garden*, and whilst waiting on the mezzanine 14-18 *Company 2* member Parker put his hand on his heart and told me how much he would miss The REP and how much he loved it. Many of them expressed pride at being part of The REP, and being insiders in a professional theatre was important to the young people. Daniel described feeling professional because there was a button to get into stage door that would be pressed for him to enter backstage. Eve elaborated, “I’d come to REP and because it’s like a professional theatre as well you’ve got the actors just walking round singing up and down the stairs.”, and 16-25 *Company* member Helen gave a vivid description during the steering group of the rehearsal rooms and what it meant for her to rehearse there:

“I remember really liking the room that we got to rehearse in, it was really big, there was windows, so a lot of the light came in and also it feels nice to be in The REP, because you do feel like part of it then, when you’re in the rehearsal room, with the Young REP, in The REP, it just tops it off”.

The drama research workshop demonstrated the intensity of the relationship that the group had with the theatre building, and the depth and breadth of memories that they had of rehearsing and performing there. During the workshop one group described The REP as “plain at first but filled with memories”. When we placed a chair in the centre stating ‘I am The REP theatre’, and asked them to step in to build the picture, the responses were exceptionally specific and detailed. They gave names of REP staff members, and their description of Stage Door included the plant, the leaflets and the fact that the chairs were warm. Many of the offers elicited responses from the rest of the group including recognition, laughter and affection:

‘I am Rehearsal Room 1, I am Bob in Stage Door, I am Bob and Babs (*some ahh’s from others*), I’m the doors where we got locked in (*laughter*), I am the trap door in the stage, I am the stage, I’m the bar where we said goodbye to Tim, I’m the Green Room, I’m the stairs where we had to wait when we were locked in, I’m the costume department, I’m the old *Musicals* practice room, I’m the warm chairs in stage door (*A few low level, ‘ahhs’ and ‘so warm’*), I’m Robin the Stage Manager, I’m the piano in the rehearsal room, I am the plant at Stage Door, I am the leaflets at Stage Door, I am Emma’s Mum (who worked in the costume department), I’m department X where they keep all the animal hats, I’m the water dispenser, I’m someone Front of House doing a flash mob.’

The last comment, ‘I’m someone Front of House doing a flash mob’, was from a student at Birmingham School of Acting (BSA) who was helping Hannah Phillips with the workshop. The flash mob she referred to had been part of her Applied Performance degree course. Similar to the *Shenley Academy Young REP* case study, this demonstrates that performing at the theatre creates a memory which provides a connection to the building on a more

personal level. This memory was then used by the participant to describe the theatre building, rather than just stating a generic theatre component.

The group who took photographs of The REP before it closed were not able to photograph the rehearsal rooms that they had fond memories of, as they were now demolished.

Moreover, due to the proximity to the evening's performance we were unable to access backstage, so they were not able to take pictures of as many of the areas that they wanted to. However, there were still a lot of places front of house that they had memories attached to. When we asked them to respond to the photographs in the drama research workshop their still images all represented specific recollections of rehearsing or performing at the theatre. A photograph of the staircase gave them the chance to tell the story of once being accidentally locked in, and that going up the stairs to the rehearsal room meant that they were going somewhere they felt safe (Leverett, 2011, p9). They thought that the mezzanine photograph was important because, "[...] we all had our personal memories attached". Parker told me when we were there for *The Secret Garden* that his favourite memory was of a Christmas party a few years ago on the Mezzanine where all of the central groups were together, the big wheel was outside, they were singing and it started to snow. When we asked them what was missing they were able to create pictures of the areas that they were unable to access, and each group created four or five distinct images. They provided very specific details, including "the clock that didn't work", "the corridor that always smelt of paint", and several groups created pictures which included the lemons in one of the rehearsal rooms. They responded with recognition to each other's remembrances, and their descriptions were evocative - alongside the smell of paint and warm chairs they described "the good feeling inside" that they got at the theatre.



(Photograph above- taken by *14-18 Company 2 Young REP* of the façade of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, December 2010)

### ***Without a building***

The young people's strong attachment to the theatre building meant that its closure was very relevant to them. They had already had to move rehearsal locations several times, and although they were settled in BSA David expressed a liminal feeling: "I think with The REP I feel like we had some ownership over it, like I felt really comfortable around her and although BSA probably has better facilities than The REP I feel like I shouldn't be there, I don't know like it's not my space, we've like borrowed it". His use of the term 'her' to describe the theatre hints at a close relationship to it, and the use of the expression 'it's not my space' exemplifies the complexities of insider and outsider spaces and feelings of belonging (Cresswell, 2004, p20). He also expressed the fear that without the building as a base the Young REP would become more disparate and the groups have less to relate to each other about. When Hannah Phillips reflected on the work that the Young REP had produced during the year of my field work her main reservation was that, although a lot of great work was produced, fewer people from The REP organisation had come to see it, as it was out of the building and therefore less obvious and less convenient. She was concerned that this meant that the impact of it was institutionally diminished.

When we gave them the two choices, *The theatre being closed will be a disaster* and *The theatre being closed will be an opportunity*, the young people stood mainly in the middle of the line of continuum, one stood next to *opportunity*, and three headed towards the *disaster* end. Those in the middle could mainly see the positive and negative outcomes; Annabel explained her position, “it’s sad at the moment as there’s no central base for REP, but it will be better in the long run because there will be loads of new opportunities”, and Parker explained why he was in the middle, “it could be a disaster as it could lose money but it could be a good thing because it’s going to have to be in different environments, it could be introducing new people to theatre and showing them a different side to it”.

Daniel was the nearest to *disaster*, and he explained why: “if it was closed it might lose its best audiences. They might not want to come back when it’s re-opened”. Another Young REP member near to Daniel added, “I think it’s not just to do with the fact that it’s the performance space because you can use other spaces but it’s the whole back stage the fact that people know it, the actors there and people like us, our memories, that’s lost and that’s all going to be different when we go back”. Daniel’s comment demonstrates the complex interaction between the physical space of the theatre and the interactions that are experienced within that space, as Massey (2005) explains: “we are always, inevitably, making spaces and places. The temporary cohesions or articulations of relations, the provisional and partial enclosures, the repeated practices which chisel their way into being established flows, these spatial forms mirror the necessary fixings of communication and identity” (p175).

The young person standing next to *opportunity* felt that it provided the chance to engage with new audiences: “when it opens there’ll be new stage opportunities for and people will be brought in by it being new and interesting so I think on the whole it will be beneficial”.

Although Hannah Phillips recognised the value of the close relationship that the young people had to the theatre building, she was also keen to use the time when the theatre was dark to challenge their perceptions of theatre as just building based. Therefore, she was eager for them to create site-specific work and to define their identity as a company rather than just in terms of the theatre building. Introducing the young people to theatrical experiences outside of a theatre is an important part of democratising theatre and making it more accessible. As Belfiore and Bennett explain, the architectural grandeur of many theatres can enhance the perception of them as being high culture, and thus engender veneration in an audience. However, non-traditional theatre spaces will not have the same effect on an audience (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007, p260). Govan et al draw on Baz Kershaw to note that, for many people, theatre's association with consumerism and highly defined practices can limit opportunities to query the status quo (Govan *et al.*, 2007, p7).

Therefore one element of making the Young REP accessible both for participants and their audiences could be tied up with the performance venue choices. This was also a relevant endeavour for the professional REP, who were using the two years the theatre building was closed to perform in a variety of venues and build new audiences. Hannah Phillips was aware that artistically much of the most dynamic theatre of the last decade has been site specific rather than theatre building based, and introducing the young people to this type of performance would enhance their skills base (Jackson, 2010, p22).

During the drama research workshop the young people had mixed reactions to the statements *The REP is the theatre building* and *The REP has a life of its own/its own identity*. They spaced themselves out along the whole line of continuum. The fact that to them the term The REP mainly signified their Young REP group and their memories of being part of it was significant to the reasons that they gave for their positions, wherever they were on the spectrum. Those who were standing next to *The REP is the theatre building* clarified their position with the following thoughts: "too much has gone on *in* the building,

at that place for it to expand too far”, and “I think The REP is that theatre. So a new theatre will be new, in the way there is Old REP and REP. The new one will be something different”. Those who were at the opposite end of the continuum explained their choice:

Steph: The majority of the time you use the term REP it is to say something like Reppers or people at REP, it’s not about the actually building itself, so for me what I associate more with REP is what it represents, it represents the people

Parker: Yeah ‘cos there’s like the big REP family and the building is just the home of the family. It’s still a family even though that’s gone. It’s got a life of its own because it’s always changing.

May: The REP building brought The Reppers together but I think we can still move from that into something more.

One young person exemplified how a building becomes something more meaningful than its architecture when it is associated with memory (Massey, 2005, p9 and p175; Govan *et al.*, 2007, p108): “I think to people outside of The REP that don’t really go there it was just a building to them...but it’s more like a family too when you’re there....so even though The REP building’s gone, we’re still carrying on the work, so it’s still there”. Another Young REP participant understood that the repetition of those experiences in another building could engender the same feelings, stating “we can make The REP wherever we want but I think for us personally it’s always going to be like our home really, like the old building. But say we kept on doing it at the Crescent [theatre] then after a couple of years we’d probably think that of the Crescent.”.

The use of the term The REP to refer to their own group demonstrated how much a part of the theatre they felt, exemplified by their choice to create a butterfly to represent The REP if it was a creature. They explained it in the following way:

“[It]Started off in a cocoon, butterflies only last a few days, the building’s gone, but we’re coming back, we’re blossoming, we’re doing new things, and we’re all beautiful. Also social butterfly as REP is a social thing. Also the change people make when they join The REP so when they first come in they’re like the cocoon and then you become more confident and get your true colours”.

Although they had expressed a great deal of emotional attachment to the theatre, they demonstrated optimism about the future without a building. When we asked them to step into the picture ‘I am The REP without a building’, they produced a number of offers which related to creativity and trying new things:

‘I am love of theatre at the centre, things branching out from the theatre, I am The REP Christmas party, I am making new friends, happiness, freedom, I am the social butterfly that represents the friends that you make at REP, being unique, I am the audience, bravery and trying something new, lots of different directions you can go, I am showing The REP is in lots of different places, I am happy to be here, I am creativity even though it’s closed, I am the welcoming person, I am the experiences that we have at The REP, I am the mini Green room, I am representing the new ideas’

## **Conclusion**

The young people who attended *14-18 company 2* had felt embedded into the Birmingham Repertory theatre building, and regarded their youth theatre group as being synonymous with the building itself. This was as a result of rehearsing there on a weekly basis over many years and performing in the 140 seat studio theatre, The Door. Although they had also performed at the Old Rep theatre, their weekly relationship with The REP theatre meant that they related to that building much more deeply than they did to the Old REP. They declared a sense of ownership of The REP theatre, and expressed the pleasure of



being backstage where the professional actors were and pride at people knowing they attended the Young REP. The move out of the theatre to rehearse and its subsequent closure for refurbishment had been challenging for them, as they felt displaced and bereft from their memories of The REP. However, with Hannah Phillips's help they were beginning to embrace the opportunities and potential that being outside of the theatre offered them.

The Young REP gave *14-18 Company 2's* members the truly liminal experience of youth theatre that Hughes and Wilson(2004) note was so important to many youth theatre attenders - a non-institutional space different from school and home where they had friends outside of their regular peer group (p65 and 69). Many of the young people expressed how deep those friendships were, and how they valued the support that they gave each other. However, the group was not representative of Birmingham in terms of class and ethnicity, and the strong bonds that the young people had developed with each other over the years made it difficult to integrate new people into the group.

Hannah Phillips, with the support of Steve Ball and Rhys McClelland, was being proactive in diversifying the group, but acknowledged that it was going to take time and a number of strategies to do so. Hannah Phillips left The REP at the end of my field work period (August 2011) and was replaced by Jessica Farmer in the new role of Director of Learning and Participation. In the next section I will explore the changes that Jessica made to the Young REP, both in response to my report on my research findings and as part of the on-going strategy to diversify the central groups, foster interaction between the groups, and enhance the relationship between the satellite groups and the theatre.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

*“...in the most forward-thinking theatres in the twenty-first century, theatre managers are placing education and learning central to the ethos of the entire cultural organisation”*

*(Nicholson, 2011, p208)*

### **Introduction**

This research has explored the interrelationships of internationalism/globalisation and multiculturalism, and the impact that they have on the aesthetic and ethical decisions of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre’s youth theatre, the Young REP. It has also examined the relationship that the young people have with the theatre building itself. It has considered the effect that space and place have had on these relationships, including how young people navigate the city space, the effect that architecture has on perception, and how having access to the theatre space affects the meaning that young people attach to the building.

### **Internationalism/ globalisation, multiculturalism and participation**

I have argued in this thesis that Britain is a multicultural society, where by multiculturalism is a lived experience of diversity, as Naidoo (2010) notes:

“The fact that we live in a ‘diverse’ society is not a cause for ‘celebrations ‘ but a simple and banal fact [...] an historic legacy of colonialism, part of the intercultural dynamism and exchange that characterises all cultures and civilisations, and also an effect of contemporary global flows of capital and labour” (p79)

As I have considered, accepting the fact of this diversity, it is important to ensure fairness of access across civic, political and social life, through a consideration of potential

inequalities and barriers. The arts are certainly not exempt from this scrutiny as participation in the arts provides cultural capital and is fundamental for a fulfilling life (Anderson *et al.*, 2009, p1; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p2). However, how accessible an individual finds the arts to be is dependent on their background.

### **In-between zones**

Diversity brings with it great creative potential, and in consideration of the theatre Baz Kershaw draws on the ecological term 'edge effects', which describes the tension and potential created in areas where distinctive ecologies meet. Through this metaphor he warns against like-minded audiences, and advocates that theatres need variety in order to stay vital and relevant, "In other words, more deliberate diversity in the audience would be a positive force for revitalising theatre ecology" (Kershaw, 2007, p204). Edge-effects are a form of in-between zone - this liminal area which allows for greater freedom of expression and the potential for change is particularly potent in theatre and youth, and thus especially so where the two meet – youth theatre. The in-between zone is further enhanced when a youth theatre group is based in a diasporic community, such as Small Heath, as due to their boundary crossing, diasporas themselves provide a liminal space where in identity's can be negotiated (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p40; Radhakrishnan, 2003, p129; Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p5).

### **Creativity, diversity and young people**

Diversity in theatre making is now being advocated not with a minority rights agenda, but rather because it is *good* for creativity, as Mahamdallie (2010) states:

"There must be the construction of a new framework for viewing diversity, one that takes out the negative or 'deficit' model and places it in an artistic context.

Diversity becomes not an optional extra but part of the fabric of our discussions

and decisions about how we encourage an energetic, relevant, fearless and challenging artistic culture in England and the wider world” (p106)

Engaging young people in theatre can have positive outcomes for young people and theatres alike. For theatres, it is fundamental for their survival tomorrow and for their vitality today. As Nicholson (2011) notes: “Without a willingness to learn and engage in dialogue, all theatres become intellectually stale, artistically lifeless and emotionally moribund and enlightened theatres have learnt to listen to the voices of young people both as audience members and as fellow artists” (p209). For young people, participating in drama and the creation of theatre improves Lisbon Key Competencies, augments personal and social skills, aids transition to adulthood and enhances cultural capital, (Hughes & Wilson, 2004, p58; The-DICE-Consortium, 2010; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993, p7). The National Association of Youth Theatre’s aim “to ensure every young person has the opportunity as a right to take part in safe, empowering, challenging theatre of excellence” highlights the value of access and entitlement to youth theatre, and thus requires youth theatres to be accessible (Neelands, 2010, p8). Raynsford (2010) agrees that this is essential, but acknowledges it is difficult to implement and requires a large degree of proactivity on the part of organisations (p8).

### **Barriers to accessing youth theatre**

This thesis has argued that access to theatre and youth theatre is an entitlement; however, barriers to accessing theatre and youth theatre are manifold and complex, and this research has specifically highlighted the effect of ethnicity and class. Identifying particular communities that a theatre is not already engaging with, highlighting specific barriers and implementing strategies to circumvent them, helps to provide equality of access. However, this has its own complexities as there is a plethora of communities and no community is homogenous, even if it may look as though it is from the outside (Benhabib, 2002, p5 and

p61). I have argued that, bearing this in mind, community is still a relevant term and can be a useful way of beginning to identify barriers, as long as internal diversity is also recognised. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done: as Raynsford (2010) highlights, research has shown that 37% of youth theatres do not have strategies in place to target 'hard to reach' young people (p8).

### **Building based youth theatres**

Youth theatres that are attached to theatre buildings have the additional barrier of the theatre architecture itself (Nicholson, 2011, p209). This thesis has shown that young people can feel a very deep sense of belonging and ownership inside a theatre building once granted access, but it has also demonstrated that young people who are from minoritised ethnicities and/or working class backgrounds find this access harder to achieve than those from white middle class backgrounds. The REP has implemented a wide range of strategies to address this inequality of access, and continues to do so. The young people from *Small Heath Young REP* and *Shenley Academy Young REP* that I interviewed expressed that the practice of establishing Young REP groups in chosen communities was paramount to them accessing youth theatre provision and establishing a relationship with The REP. Both groups stated that they would not have known about the Young REP groups based at the theatre, and that its school base had given them the sense that they had a 'right' to be there. As Zahid noted, "[...] because it's our school you feel some ownership over it. That you do belong there". *Shenley Young REP's* community base allowed the youth theatre directors to tailor the provision to the needs of the young people in an area with high levels of disenfranchisement, as the style of youth theatre delivery will probably need to differ from work with young people with higher levels of self-esteem (Raynsford, 2010, p34). In *Small Heath* it provided a safety zone to explore theatre in a community where, for many residents, it was not culturally the norm. However, there is still more work to be done to

strengthen the relationship between these satellite groups and the theatre building, and to diversify access to the groups that are based in the city centre.

### **Ethnicity, class and community**

Through a consideration of community, I discovered that *Small Heath Young REP* had a positive localised identity which was in part informed by the fact that the area's residents were predominantly of Pakistani and Muslim heritage. *Shenley Academy Young REP* did not have the same positive local identity. Rather, they were very negative about their surrounding area, describing it as a 'chav' neighbourhood and somewhere people would not want to live. *Shenley's* location on the outskirts of Birmingham provided a geographical barrier to accessing the theatre, which was exacerbated by the risk of being victims of crime when moving around Northfield and Weoley Castle, and thus many of the young people needing parental accompaniment to travel into the city centre. *Small Heath's* relationship to the city space was more complex than their relationship to their local area, as the young people did not often travel into the city centre, partly due to lack of independent mobility and partly because young people from BAME backgrounds often stay within communities where they feel safe for fear of racist abuse (hooks, 2009, p70).

Although the participants of *Small Heath Young REP* did not explicitly cite fear of racism, they did express that they thought other youth theatres were all attended by white, middle class young people. Aisha discussed worries about 'not fitting in' with the central Young REP groups, and when Zahid related his experience (through the steering group) that when he met the central groups members they were all white and middle class and he felt out of place, the others all agreed that they would also feel out of place in that environment.

*Shenley Young REP* members also had similar fears of not fitting in to the central groups, fears which were rooted in class assumptions, both about others and themselves. These were manifest in an apprehension about meeting new people and the perception that the central Young REP members would be 'posh' and more talented than they were. As I have

discussed, aside from the overt issues of racism and classism, ethnicity and class can affect access due to perceived cultural norms, lack of cultural capital, and people not seeing themselves represented in artistic products and thus feeling they are 'not for them' (Harland *et al.*, 1995, p37).

As I described in the prologue, as part of their strategy to remove some of these barriers, during the summer of 2011 the (now former) Director of Young People's Theatre Hannah Phillips and youth theatre director Rhys McClelland set up outreach workshops through the scheme *Positive Futures*, a Home Office funded initiative described as "[...] a prevention and diversionary programme which targets and supports vulnerable 10-19 year olds to avoid them becoming drawn into crime, substance misuse and serious youth violence"<sup>45</sup>. By harnessing the contacts that the youth workers had already established with young people, and offering them a drama workshop in their own community centre, it was hoped they would then join the Young REP. I asked the participants to complete questionnaires, and the barriers that they identified were very similar to those identified by *Small Heath* and *Shenley*. For example, participants from the Wednesbury group (all white British, high social deprivation and 40 minutes from the city centre) cited similar barriers to *Shenley* - half of the group felt that the cost of travelling into Birmingham would be prohibitive and over half would need to be accompanied by an adult (this could be in part due to their ages). The workshops took place in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 summer riots, and the Handsworth *Positive Futures* workshop took place in an area where riots had taken place and, at that point, were not necessarily over. Four young people identified their ethnicity as Pakistani, one as Bangladeshi and two as white and Asian. Their responses could be seen as demonstrating similar fears to the young people at *Small Heath* about youth theatres being predominantly for white young people, as, although five of the young people did want to meet people from different backgrounds to themselves, two strongly

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.bvsc.org/news/positive-futures-funding-opportunities>

disagreed and two young people strongly agreed that they would worry about fitting in. However, although (apart from one unsure participant) all of the young people agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the workshops, none of them went on to access the Young REP. Rhys McClelland felt that this was because there was not enough support from the youth workers and steps were not put in place to remove the geographical and economic barriers to access. When I reflect on the work that The REP has undertaken since the end of my field work, I will explore the ways that future outreach strategies have tackled these barriers more effectively.

The sensitivities that many people feel around ethnicity, race and religion mean that open dialogues are often avoided and inaccurate assumptions can be made. This was an area that Rhys McClelland was aware needed to be developed in order to enhance the relationship between *Small Heath Young REP* and the theatre.

### **Theatre spaces and meaning making**

Once barriers to access have been circumnavigated and young people are inside a theatre building, the experience that they then have within the space is also important, as Nicholson (2011) highlights: “making space for learning in theatres not only requires new ways of thinking about participation and new aesthetic forms, .., it also depends on young people’s ability to generate their own spatial meanings within the building” (p209). Due to their sustained access to it, the meanings that *14-18 Company 2* had generated inside the theatre were deep and multi-facteted. However, giving a larger number of young people this level of access to a producing theatre becomes spatially and logistically problematic. Nevertheless, as the drama research workshop with *Shenley Academy Young REP* revealed, accessing the building only once or twice to perform still allows the young people to generate meanings. For example, the young people demonstrated that from their own experience the rehearsal rooms mean boredom and the stage means excitement. This



results in them having a much greater sense of ownership and connection to the theatre than if they had not been given this access, as was shown by *Small Heath's* responses to the same task.

Members of *14-18 Company 2* expressed a desire to have an open and inclusive youth theatre, and this is most certainly the aim of The REP. However, as Raynsford (2010) notes in *Inclusive Youth Theatre*, although most youth theatres consider themselves welcome and open to everyone, in order to actually be so in practice they need to put appropriate support structures in place, "in other words, ensuring your doors are metaphorically open is not enough" (p9). The very strong bonds that this group expressed towards one another and their youth theatre, alongside the fears of potential members about fitting in, necessitate care to ensure that young people joining the group have a positive experience and that current participants are supported during the transition phase.

### **The relationship between the groups**

At the time of my field work the Young REP consisted of 200- 250 members across nine groups - five based in the centre of Birmingham and four based in targeted communities. This research discovered that the Young REP did not have a strong overarching identity, and there was very little interaction between the different groups. Through the steering group, young people expressed that they did not feel the groups had any real connection. This was supported by the questionnaires which showed that the majority of members of *Small Heath* and *Shenley* Young REP did not know people from other groups. However, the majority of *14-18 Company 2* did, which supplements the assertion made during the steering group about some limited interactions between young people meeting at the same rehearsal space. These interactions were informal and social (seeing each other in the waiting area before rehearsals) rather than facilitated and creative. However, in the same questionnaire, although the majority of the members of *Small Heath* and *14-18*

*Company 2* felt the Young REP groups were not connected, over half of *Shenley* felt they were. This could be because *Shenley* had recently performed as part of a festival with three other Young REP groups, demonstrating the cohesive effect of such events. Most of the young people wanted opportunities to work with the other Young REP groups, with the vast majority strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement that working with other groups was important.

Although the satellite groups expressed awareness of the existence (if not the specifics) of the central groups, the reverse was not true. The only reason that some members of *14-18 Company 2* did know about them seemed to be due to having met them at the steering group a few weeks prior to my asking them the question. As Annabel noted in the group interview, "The only time I met any of them was at the steering group". Therefore, they did not think that they were as important to The REP as the central groups. When given the statement *The satellite Groups feel as important to The REP as the Central groups*, 14 disagreed (3 strongly) and 4 were unsure. This was supported by the group interview, where Eve and Joanna both expressed it was unfair that historically the satellite groups did not get the same performance opportunities that the central groups did. Annabel said that the terminology *Satellite groups* made them seem less important, and this was something that Hannah Phillips was also keen to change as part of an overall branding strategy. Jessica Farmer and Rhys McClelland articulated the same aim.

Interaction between young people can be stressful for them, particularly with people who are from significantly different backgrounds. Participants may have low self-esteem, or have experienced negative interactions in the past, and may feel threatened or competitive (Wetherell *et al.*, 2007, p12). Some members of *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* were concerned about meeting young people from other groups, and this could in part have been because, when performing alongside them in *Secrets and Gardens*, a group from a

nearby school (quite possibly due to local rivalry) had ‘booed’ them during the technical rehearsal. Although this group were made to apologise, it may have fostered hesitancy about future interactions. Even members of *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* who were keen to meet up expressed fear of not being as good as the central groups. They felt it should be with another school based group because, as Peter explained in the group interview, “[...] they’re in the same situation as us, in the fact that they’re not as close to The REP as us either”. This demonstrates how important it is to be aware of any potential problematic issues before attempting interactions, and for said interactions to be sensitively facilitated.

## **The Impact of this research on the Young REP**

Coinciding with the end of my field work, in August 2011 Hannah Phillips left The REP to take up a full time post at Birmingham School of Acting. In September 2012 The REP appointed Jessica Farmer to the new post of Director of Learning and Participation, and two new youth theatre directors, Daniel Tyler and Tom Saunders, alongside Rhys McClelland. I attended their team Away Day and provided some input about my research findings. I then gave them an interim report in the form of an article for *Drama*, National Drama’s magazine, developed from a conference paper I had presented at the National Drama Swansea 2011 conference. I asked Jessica Farmer in an interview in January 2013 if my report had had any impact on her decisions regarding the Young REP:

“It impacted on lots of stuff, actually. That was really part of kick-starting how we could bring in *Shenley* and *Small Heath* to feel more part of the company and feel more connected. That started off the whole idea of the festival and how we bring everybody together. So it was a major part of rethinking how we identify ourselves as one whole company [...] It was a big part [...] It was more evidence of some of the issues that had been raised.”

Rhys McClelland's reflective interview in March 2013 supported much of what Jessica Farmer had said, and he identified that having a dedicated researcher with an outside eye had offered an important perspective:

“We look at the satellites very differently now. We're even looking at trying to rebrand them and not refer to them as satellites. We're looking at ways to try and integrate them. I think if this research hadn't started I don't think that from the inside we would have been able to identify those issues”.

He was also keen that the research had tracked the difficult process of change that the Young REP had undergone, and provided evidence of the on-going hard work that was needed to create a genuinely diverse youth theatre.

### **Diversity and access**

In December 2012 I attended a sharing at Birmingham Ormiston Academy (BOA) in the city centre. It was the scratch performances of the Young REP's *Discovery Term*. There were now four *14-18 Companies* rather than two, and I was struck by the fact that, although I recognised a lot of the young people, there were as many whom I had never seen before. Just at a glance the group looked much more representative of Birmingham, and the atmosphere in the room was exciting and charged. The performances were diverse in form and content - there was a devised piece, a mask piece, a Bhangra version of *Romeo and Juliet* and a Grime version of *Oedipus*. The audience was comprised of the groups watching each other's performances. After thoroughly enjoying the artistic experience I left with a big smile on my face, thinking that it was now a much better model of what a youth theatre attached to a major repertory theatre in a multicultural city should be like.

Following the trajectory of Hannah Phillips' work to diversify the Young REP and responding to my research findings, Jessica Farmer and her team had achieved the transformation from two majority white, middle class city centre based groups that did not represent

Birmingham, to four groups of young people from a range of ethnicities that were much more representative of the city. I asked Jessica to explain her strategies during an interview in January 2013. The first action that she had taken was to double the provision of the groups based in the centre and fill most of the places from the database with those young people who had patiently been waiting years for the opportunity to be involved. The following year she implemented recruitment strategies aimed at widening participation in the central groups. Firstly, she worked with the host school Birmingham Ormiston Academy (BOA) (where rehearsals now take place) to fast track some of their students. The intake at BOA is from across the city and the region, and thus fairly representative of Birmingham. Secondly, the youth theatre directors ran workshops in schools in targeted areas, including Handsworth (the area where one of the positive futures workshops was held), and offered the first five people to sign up for the Young REP a voucher for a free term. Thirdly, the youth theatre directors identified young people that were interested in joining the central Young REP groups from *Shenley* and *Small Heath*. One of those now attending both his local and a central group is Yacoub from *Small Heath*, as well as a member from *Shenley Young REP* and one from Harborne Academy (a school that The REP already had a five year relationship with through long term Learning & Participation projects). Fourthly, Jessica Farmer formed a new Young REP group at Harborne Academy, and due to the demographic of the school all of the members are from BAME backgrounds. As part of a strategy to unify the work of the Young REP, allow the young people to see each other's work, feel part of something bigger than their own group and be given the chance to take part in what would hopefully be the highlight of the Young REP's year, Jessica Farmer had taken an idea from my interim report and organised a Young REP festival for July 2013, taking place at The Old Rep Theatre.

In order to dissipate the perception of some Young REP members having higher status due to the longevity of their membership and to create four diverse groups, Jessica Farmer was

keen to create a situation where long term members and newer members would be working together. To facilitate this she established all four groups as part of one large company who elected to take part in one of four projects each term. The Young REP team developed the *Discovery Term* project in conjunction with the (now former) Associate Producer (BAMETI), with the theory that if you diversify the art form the rest will follow. The young people each experienced a two-hour workshop of each of the art forms in carousel. The Bhangra workshop was led by a youth theatre director alongside a Bhangra artist called Jag Kumar, and the Grime Oedipus workshop by a youth theatre director and Grime artist Decypher. The young people then chose an order of preference for which project they wanted to work on for the rest of the term. This approach meant that the groups were automatically a mixture of new and established Young REP members simply through artistic choice. The offer of a variety of art forms also allowed young people to choose a project which they were more culturally identified with if they wanted to, but equally they could choose an art form that was removed from their cultural background if they wished. This avoided the problem of compartmentalising those from BAME backgrounds into ethnicity specific art forms yet still allowed The REP to offer and value a diverse range of performance opportunities (Panayiotu in Appignanesi, 2010, p2).

The evaluation forms at the end of the project were extremely positive and covered many of the same themes. Some representative examples of responses to the question *What did you enjoy most about the Discovery Term?* are as follows:

“Working and collaborating with people you usually wouldn’t work with such as Deci4 and Jag”

“Trying out different skills, working with new people and directors”

“I enjoyed making new friends and working with new people. I liked how we had the chance to think of our own ideas and be treated like adults”

“I enjoyed trying something new and learning there are many forms of drama”

“Not being limited to usual styles such as naturalism”

“I enjoyed how I got to discover another culture and a different type of dancing”

“We got to show what we worked on to each group”

The responses showed that by diversifying the form and asking the young people to choose their project it was successful in challenging perceptions of what theatre is, validated performance styles from beyond the Western theatre tradition, and encouraged the groups to mix up and work with new young people in a positive way.

Working alongside Jessica Farmer and the youth theatre directors, the (now former) Associate Producer (BAMETI) advocated offering a diversity of form and content as an effective way to make youth theatre groups more accessible for young people from backgrounds other than white and middle class. The *Discovery Term* project appears to support this assertion, as there was a high retention rate of new members from minoritised ethnicities. There is the potential that once the group begins to diversify it will diversify further, as young people from BAME and working class backgrounds begin to see people they identified with in the productions and thus feel welcome. However, it is also important to continue to engage with outreach strategies to avoid falling back into a pattern of only recruiting young people who are self-motivated and supported enough to seek out the provision themselves.

Continuing to offer the opportunity for young people from the Young REP companies based in schools to join centrally based Young REP groups would also help to make the central

groups more representative of Birmingham. A group based in Northfield for younger children (aged 7-11) was successful in integrating all of the young people into the central Juniors group (and as they grew up, into the intermediate group), but as Rhys McClelland noted in his third (reflective) interview in March 2013, “[...]it would be easy to see the diversity of the Intermediate Groups and get complacent”. However, he asks the question: now that the project is no longer there, how are the primary aged young people of Northfield engaging with The REP? As is true for all organisations, the work of widening participation needs to be continuously repeated. Jessica Farmer reflected, after reading an earlier draft of this conclusion, that there were on going challenges in terms of maintaining the voucher scheme which had helped to widen participation. A major challenge is the fiscal matter that the fees paid by the Young REP members were essential for employing the youth theatre directors, and this thus limited the amount of vouchers they could offer. She also highlighted that they needed to avoid any stigma for those on the voucher scheme and the complexities of deciding who should be eligible for vouchers.

## **Returning to the theatre building**

This thesis has demonstrated that the group which had historically met at the theatre had a much stronger relationship with the building than those who convened in their own schools. They valued rehearsing at The REP, as it granted them insider status and had given them a sense of ownership of the space. However, when the theatre re-opens on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013 Jessica Farmer explained that they will not be moving the Young REP back to the building but will continue to rehearse at BOA. The reasons are inherently spatial, as she explained, “mainly because we wouldn’t get rehearsal space every week. We would be moved around a lot and we would have to reduce the size of our Young REP”. However, in order to maintain (and in many cases create) a relationship with the building,



they will hold a launch event at The REP each September in the Main House which all Young REP members will attend:

“The launch event will always start off the year and it will be in The REP. We can do lots of backstage tours, introduce them to the building and make them feel welcome. We’ll also have regular meetings with them through the year. We’ll invite them to certain productions on ‘*Young REP night*’ and we’ll meet them beforehand. Sharings will also always happen in The REP. Although rehearsals will happen at BOA, major events will happen at The REP.”

This research has demonstrated that bringing a group to perform at the theatre significantly enhances the relationship that the group has with the building. The meanings about the theatre space that *Shenley* had created were much deeper and embedded in lived experience, compared to those of *Small Heath* which were aspirational and connected to theatre in general rather than specifically The REP. This was achieved by simply giving them the opportunity to perform, not even rehearse (aside from technical rehearsals), at the theatre. I would therefore argue that by having regular meetings and performance opportunities at the theatre, the Young REP members would develop a sense of ownership and belonging in the building. Although there will not be groups with the same depth of belonging to the building as *14-18 Company 2*, by offering the same degree of access to all there will be greater equity of access and belonging. This sense of belonging and attachment to the building could facilitate future attendance at the theatre, and thus provide the kind of enrichment and cultural capital that theatre can bring. Jessica Farmer reflected, on reading a draft of this conclusion, that they are very aware that it remains to be seen how the Young REP continuing to be based at BOA will impact on their relationship with the theatre building. She reiterated the commitment to holding regular events at The

REP and continuing to reflect on the relationship that the young people have with the building.

Due to the depth of feeling for the theatre building that this research uncovered within *14-18 Company 2*, it is not surprising that both Rhys McClelland and Jessica Farmer informed me that the long term members of the Young REP who had previously rehearsed at the theatre were at first disappointed that they would not be rehearsing there once it re-opened. However, once it had been explained that there would not be consistent access to the rehearsal rooms if they were to move back, but that that they would always perform at the theatre, they were satisfied with the arrangement. The young people valued the facilities at BOA, which was only built two years ago, and alongside a state of the art studio theatre there are excellent rehearsal spaces and a canteen and foyer where the young people can meet before rehearsals. The liminal facilities of the foyer and canteen, between the young people's everyday lives and the rehearsal room, are encouraging interaction between the central groups. Rhys McClelland told me that many of the young people now arrive an hour before session to congregate in these areas, chat with their friends new and old and enter rehearsals ready to settle down and work.

Rhys McClelland is excited about the prospect of the newer members, who have never been to The REP, entering the new building for the first time:

"[...] there will be this wonderful day when all of these people who've invested time in the Young REP and have come to know it as a Saturday afternoon with directors and then a sharing in a studio or at the Old Rep will all of a sudden walk into this really wonderful space, a 300 seat studio, 140 seat Door and the Main House and know that's what they bought into".

He was also excited for the long term members “to be able to introduce people they’ve spent the last two years becoming quite good friends with to a place they grew up in, that this other person has never stepped foot in before, I think is going to be very interesting being able to share the new and improved theatre with their new friends”. Due to the Artistic Director Roxana Silbert’s positive support and passion for developing new and emerging artists and supporting the Young REP, Rhys McClelland was certain that the future would offer some very exciting opportunities for Young REP members.

## **Recommendations going forwards**

The strategies started by Hannah Phillips, and then employed by Steve Ball, Jessica Farmer, Rhys McClelland and the other youth theatre directors, have gone a long way towards solving many of the problems with diversity and access that I discovered during my research. The research crystallised difficulties that they had pinpointed themselves, and allowed them to identify issues that they might not have been able to see from within and, certainly during my time undertaking field work, they did not have the capacity to explore further.

Writing about the NAYT research, Raynsford (2010) notes: “What emerged through these participative workshops was that, in reality, ensuring that ‘everyone was welcome’ and ‘no-one is excluded’ is an *extremely* hard thing to achieve” (p8). It is therefore important that The REP capitalises on these strategies and continues to engage with young people from a wide variety of backgrounds, identifying communities which they are not yet engaging with. As Rhys McClelland highlighted, it would be easy to see the diversity of the groups now and forget the hard work that was involved in obtaining it.

This research has demonstrated the importance of practical links to the building in fostering meaningful relationships between The REP and its youth theatre members. Thus,

continuing and enhancing these links, as Jessica Farmer has planned, through performances, back stage tours and events, is essential if The REP wants the Young REP to have a meaningful relationship with the building. Performances in alternative spaces can still occur, as these are all valid ways of allowing young people to explore a diversity of performance practice. However, to ensure the young people maintain a meaningful relationship with the theatre building, these would need to occur alongside regular performances and events at the theatre itself.

### **Widening participation further**

A key area which emerged several times during my research was the lack of young people with disabilities that access The REP's provision. As Eve noted when referring to the lack of BAME young people, "the same goes with disabilities, there was one person in my group who had autism last year, and I have one hand and that's about it. There is no one with wheelchairs, no one with learning difficulties other than a couple of people who have autism". Whilst realising that Eve is referring to visible disabilities or obvious learning disabilities, and that we do not know how many members of the Young REP may have unseen disabilities, her point is still valid. Disability was beyond the scope of my research, but nevertheless it is an essential component in creating a diverse and truly accessible youth theatre. As such, it should be a clear and crucial focus for the L&P department to develop strategies for meaningful engagement with young people with disabilities, and for ensuring that correct support procedures are in place (Raynsford, 2010, p9) .

Alongside the characteristics/situations that I have mentioned - ethnicity, class, geography and disability - Raynsford (2010) highlights the many areas for consideration for widening participation initiatives. She includes: experiences and responsibility linked to families; involvement with the criminal justice system and language barriers (p7). This list is not exhaustive, and could include other characteristics/situations which cause barriers to

access such as sexuality and gender. They would each require specific skills, procedures and strategies for access to be implemented, but they are all areas which are worthy of consideration if the Young REP is to be a truly inclusive and welcoming place for all young people who wish to join. As Rhys McClelland notes:

“I don’t think it’s entirely finished because at this point when we do move back into the building, there are still many areas of Birmingham we’re not recruiting from, and that will always probably be the case, we’ll be chasing around the city forever and a day I think”.

## **Conclusion**

The issues that emerged during this research were obviously of great relevance to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. As I have discussed, access to theatre and youth theatre is an entitlement, and thus this research is also pertinent for all theatre buildings and youth theatre groups because of their duty to widen participation and remove barriers to access. In fact, in our globalised, multicultural world, such are the duties of any organisation working with people. The strategies already employed by The REP have been very successful and these, along with my further recommendations (see appendix 8), could be tailored and implemented by other organisations to achieve similar results.

As for The Young REP specifically, with a new rehearsal space for the central groups, a genuinely diverse group of participants, and plans for all groups to have regular, equal access to the theatre building, if it continues in the same direction, it could continue to develop its potential as an in-between zone where young people from diverse backgrounds meet in a liminal space and create exciting and relevant youth theatre.

## Epilogue

In July 2013 the Young REP festival at the Old REP was in full swing. The Birmingham Repertory Theatre Staff had moved back into the nearly completed building ready for the re-opening on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013. Steve Ball gave me a tour, and I was impressed by the large windows and glass walls of the offices. I was also struck by the positioning of the Learning and Participation department. Steve Ball's office has Artistic Director Roxana Silbert on one side and Executive Director Stuart Rogers on the other, with only a glass wall separating them. The rest of L&P had desks in the open plan office, between the arts team and executive team. They couldn't be more centrally placed in the organisation. Steve Ball remarked to me that he felt it was indicative of how valued L&P now was. The rest of the theatre was very impressive. There was a very modern Green Room, beautiful rehearsal rooms and a new superbly equipped 300 seat studio theatre. Most exciting of all was the large foyer overlooking Centenary Square and its direct link to the new library. I could feel the vastly enhanced potential for engaging people with the theatre building, and I left it feeling excited and hopeful.

That night I saw two diverse casts of 14-18 year olds perform at The Old Rep as part of the Young REP festival. In one cast was Yacoub, whom I had met at Small Heath, who had seemingly taken to the central Young REP like a duck to water. In the other cast Clytemnestra was played by a girl with mesmerising presence. Rhys McClelland told me that through her involvement with the Young REP she had embraced Greek theatre with all of her heart. In a Greek reading group he runs she had become enthralled with the text of Medea. A deeply religious girl, she saw it as a story with huge resonance regarding what she perceived to be the negative aspects of her own Sikh culture, more so than *Bezhti* which she had borrowed two weeks before. They had since begun to combine the text with Indian classical music. He played some of it to me and it sent a shiver down my spine,

as I felt it to be so haunting and beautiful. To my mind, it has the potential to be developed into a truly original and heartfelt piece of theatre. Her fellow cast member playing the title role had only been part of Young REP for three terms, having accessed it through the outreach and voucher scheme. After the performance she sent Rhys McClelland a card saying “Thanks for believing in me”.

Two nights later I watched the other two 14-18 companies perform as part of the same festival. The first group had devised a humorous and affectionate piece about children’s literature, and the second group performed a powerful piece of new writing (co-commissioned by The REP, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Theatre Royal Plymouth) exploring the sexual labels young people give one another.

The morning after the first double bill Paul Reece, Head of Marketing at The REP, sent all of the theatre’s staff an email:

*“I have to say well done to everyone involved in this year’s Young REP festival for another evening of satisfying theatre.*

*From a clever 'laugh-out-loud' comedy with Totally Over You, to an intense ancient Greek tragedy, Iphigenia (which had the entire audience mesmerised towards the end – stunning!). A beautifully contrasting pairing of plays skilfully directed by Tom and Rhys, and some genuinely committed performances by the young people involved.”*

The growing diversity of the Young REP, achieved by the theatre’s hard work in widening participation, is having real positive impact not just on the lives of the young people involved but also on the creativity of the work. Paul Reece closed his email with the statement, “Feels like The Young REP is at the top of its game!”, and I am sure I am not alone in being excited to see what happens next.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Acronyms/abbreviations**

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BAMETI	Black and Minority Ethnic Theatre Initiative
BOA	Birmingham Ormiston Academy
BSA	Birmingham School of Acting
CDA	Collaborative Doctoral Award
D&TE	Drama and Theatre Education
L&P	Learning and Participation
NAYT	National Association of Youth Theatre's

## Appendix 2

### Names and job titles of adult participants

Name	Job Title
Steve Ball	REP Associate Director
Hannah Phillips	REP Director of Young People's Theatre
Rhys McClelland	REP Youth Theatre Director
Name withheld	REP Associate Producer (BAMETI)
Catherine Rollins	REP Participation Manager
Name withheld	REP Community Engagement Officer
Jessica Farmer	REP Director of Learning and Participation
Name withheld	REP Education Officer (schools)
Name withheld	REP Digital Officer
Joshua Delladone	REP Playwriting Officer
Stephen Lane	Shenley Academy Head of Drama
Samantha Hughes	Small Heath School Creative Arts Teacher
Rachel Gartside	REP Education Director 1990's
Clare Cochrane	Author of <i>The Birmingham Rep: A City's Theatre 1962-2002</i>
Name withheld	Contact Teacher at former Young REP satellite



## Appendix 3

### Timeline of events and data collection methods

Date	Method	Participant/s	Aim
<b>Year 1</b> October 2007 to	Preliminary Participant Observations of Young REP rehearsals and performances	Shenley Junior and Senior, Park View, Abraham Darby, Telford, Park View, 1 <sup>st</sup> Chance	Witness Events Establish Context
February 2008	Semi-Structured Interview	Previous Education Director Rachel Gartside	Historical Context of the current L&P department
15 Feb 2008	Semi-Structured Interview	Clare Cochrane	Historical context of REP
29th February 2008	<b>Performance</b> Jack and the Beanstalk at school	Small Heath Young REP	
2008	Workshop at generation conference at REP	Conference attendees	To explore the terms multiculturalism and youth theatre with a relevant group
<b>Year 2 (a)</b> October – November 2008	Preliminary Participant Observations of Young REP rehearsals and performances	Small heath, Perry Beeches, Park View	Context To experience events for myself
<b>Year 2 (b)</b> October - 2010	One initial Participant observation of a rehearsal	All Young REP groups	Context To experience events for myself
13 <sup>th</sup> October 2010 – July 2011	Regular Participant Observations of rehearsals and performances	Shenley, Small Heath, 14-18 Company 2, 1 <sup>st</sup> Chance	To experience events for myself
Semi-Structured Interview	Semi-Structured Interview	Stephen Lane	Historical context, insider view/ Multiple Perspectives
20 <sup>th</sup> November 2010	Steering group	Young REP participants from all groups apart from 16-25 and 1 <sup>st</sup> Chance	Gather opinions of the Young people Dialogue between groups
23 <sup>rd</sup> , 27 <sup>th</sup> November 2010	Pre Secrets and Gardens Questionnaire	Shenley Juniors, Juniors, Northfield Juniors	To fuse measurement with opinion Offer Anonymity (encourage honesty) Demographic information Multiple Perspectives
24 <sup>th</sup> November 2010	Semi-Structured Interview	Samantha Hughes, Small Heath	Historical context, insider view/ Multiple Perspectives

30 <sup>th</sup> November 2010	<b>Performance</b> Carol Singing at REP – Press night Secrets and Gardens	14-18 Company 2	
8 <sup>th</sup> December 2010	<b>Performances of</b> <i>Secrets and Gardens</i> at The Door at The REP	Shenley Academy Junior Young REP	
December 2010	REP photos	Group of Shenley Juniors, Group of Small heath, Group of 14-18 2, group of 1 <sup>st</sup> Chance	Visual data collection Inclusivity (Expression through a medium other than oral/written)
January 2011	Post-Performance Questionnaire	Shenley Juniors	To fuse measurement with opinion Anonymity Demographic information Multiple Perspectives Before and after comparison
18 <sup>th</sup> January 2011	Drama Workshop (post performance evaluation)	Shenley Juniors	Visual data exploration/collection Creative/holistic engagement Multiple Perspectives Liminality
Year 2 (b) January 2011	Postcards	Shenley Juniors, 14- 18 Company 2, 1 <sup>st</sup> Chance, Small Heath	Visual data Expression through a medium other than oral/written Group Identity
Year 2 (b) January 2011	Semi-Structured Interview	Joshua Delladone (Playwriting Officer) Community Engagement officer Rhys McClelland (Youth Theatre Director) (Interview 1)	Context Triangulation Multiple perspectives
February 2011	Drama Workshop	Shenley Academy Junior Young REP, 14-18 Company 2, Small Heath Young REP	Visual data exploration/collection Creative/holistic engagement Multiple Perspectives Liminality
February 2011	Semi-Structured Interview	Hannah Phillips, Steve Ball,	Context insider view Triangulation
March 2011	Semi-Structured Interview	Digital Officer, Associate Producer (BAMETI), Education Officer	Context insider view/multiple perspectives

		(schools)	
May 2011	Group Interview and identity descriptors	Small heath group Shenley juniors group 14-18 Company 2	Multiple Perspectives Trouble boundaries of racial classifications
June 2011	Identity Descriptors via email	Asked all adults I had interviewed via email	Trouble boundaries of racial classifications
29 <sup>th</sup> June 2011	<b>Performance</b> - Antigone's sister - Patricia Yardley Studio at BSA	14-18 Company 2	
7 <sup>th</sup> July 2011	Group Interview and identity descriptors	Shenley Seniors	Multiple Perspectives Trouble boundaries of racial classifications
13 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2011	Semi-Structured Interview 2	Rhys McClelland	Triangulation Obtain different perspectives and intentions
16 <sup>th</sup> July 2011	Ostrich Boys Q and A (observed)	Audience and cast	
August 2011	Attend Positive futures workshops Questionnaires to participants	Workshop participants	
16 <sup>th</sup> august 2011	Semi-Structured Interview 2	Hannah Phillips	Triangulation Obtain different perspectives and intentions
29 <sup>th</sup> September 2011	Semi-Structured Interview 2	Stephen Lane	Triangulation Obtain different perspectives
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Performance</b> - Scratch performances at BOA	Four 14-18 companies	
22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2013	Semi-Structured Interview 3	Rhys McClelland	Triangulation Reflection
16 <sup>th</sup> January 2013	Semi-Structured Interview	Jessica Farmer	To find out about events in the year after my field work To analyse for impact of my research
16 <sup>th</sup> January 2013	Semi-Structured Interview	Catherine Rollins	

## Appendix 4

### Example Questionnaire for Young REP groups

Below is an example questionnaire given to the case study Young REP groups.

#### The relationship of the Young REP groups to each other

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I don't know what the other Young REP groups are working on					
I know people in other Young REP Groups					
The Young REP groups are all connected to each other					
I have seen a performance by another Young REP group					
I have not performed with other Young REP groups					
I do not want to see performances by other Young REP groups					
Opportunities to work with other Young REP groups are important					
I do not want to work with other young REP groups					

#### The relationship of the Young REP groups to The REP building/without a building

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I felt comfortable going to The REP theatre					
The REP theatre was not a welcoming building					

The REP Theatre was a place to be playful					
The REP Theatre was a place to be serious					
I went to see theatre at The REP					
I have performed at The REP theatre					
I do not miss The REP theatre now it is closed					
I do not know about the performances by The REP at other venues					
I have seen a performance by The REP at another venue					
The REP still has an identity without a building					
The Young REP is important to The REP theatre					

**The relationship of the Young REP to their communities**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
My local community is friendly					
I feel part of my local community					
I am respected in my local community for being part of the Young REP					
I do not want my community to watch Young REP performances					
My Young REP group represents my local community					

**The relationship of the Young REP groups to wider global communities**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I have friends that live in other parts of Birmingham from me					
I have family that live in other parts of the world					
I have nothing in common with people in other parts of the world					
The internet has made the world smaller					
I do not use the internet to contact people in other parts of the world					
I have lived in a country other than Britain					

**Relationship of the groups to wider global communities – digital and media habits**

	<b>Daily</b>	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Monthly</b>	<b>Yearly</b>	<b>Never</b>
I access Facebook					
I watch the news on television					
I read a newspaper					
I watch international news channels					
I have contact with people in other countries					

**Length of time as a Young REP member**

0-6 months ☐

6 months to 1 year ☐

1-2 years ☐

2-3 years ☐

3-4 years ☐

4-5 years ☐

5 years or more ☐

**Gender**

Male ☐

Female ☐

**Age in Years**

11-14 ☐

15-17 ☐

18-21 ☐

22-25 ☐

*Please tick which of the following groups best describes your ethnic origins*

<b>White</b>  British <input type="checkbox"/> Irish <input type="checkbox"/>  Any other White background <input type="checkbox"/>  (please specify)  _____	<b>Black or Black British</b>  African <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/>  Any other Black background <input type="checkbox"/>  (please specify)  _____	<b>Asian or Asian British</b>  Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/>  Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/>  Any other Asian background <input type="checkbox"/>  (please specify)  _____
<b>Mixed</b>  White and Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/>  White and Black African <input type="checkbox"/>  White and Asian <input type="checkbox"/>  White and Chinese <input type="checkbox"/>  Any other mixed background <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Any Other</b>  Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino <input type="checkbox"/>  Irish Traveller <input type="checkbox"/> Roma Gypsy/Traveller <input type="checkbox"/>  Any other background <input type="checkbox"/>  (please specify)  _____	

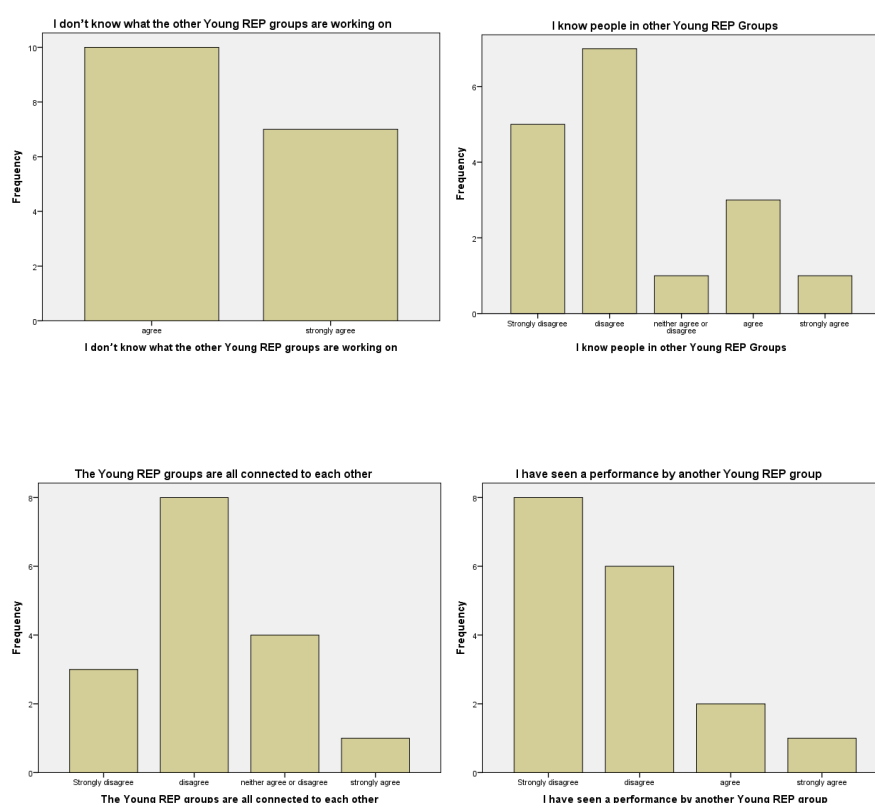
<p>(please specify)</p>  <hr/>	<p>I do not wish my ethnic background to be recorded <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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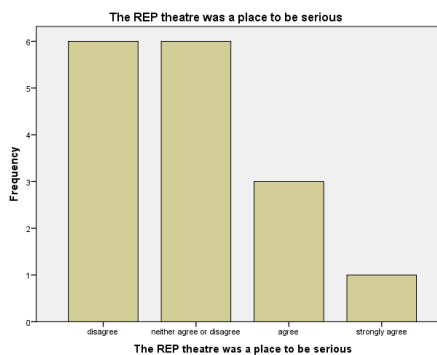
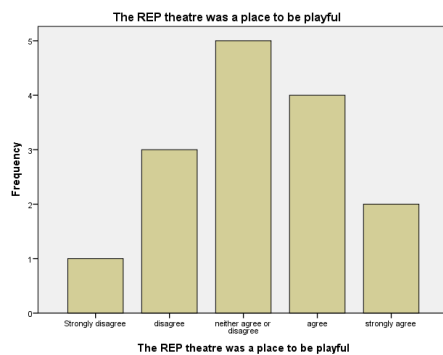
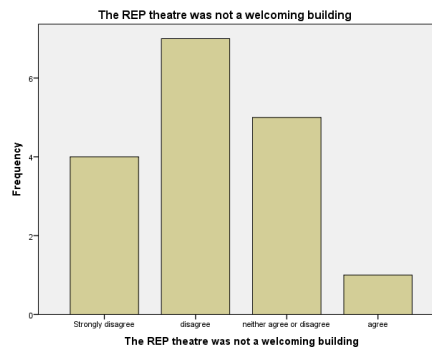
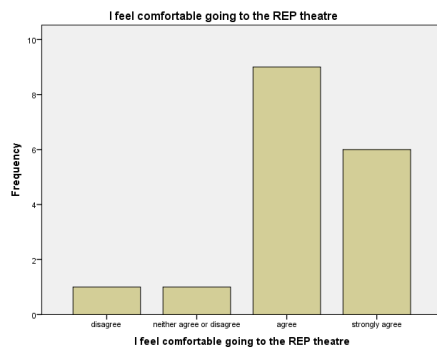
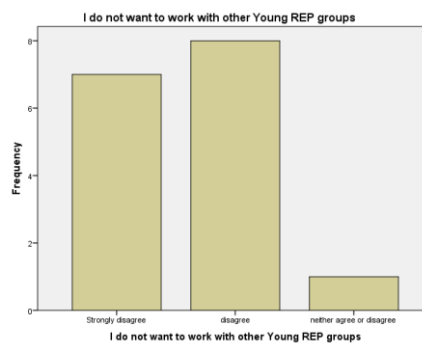
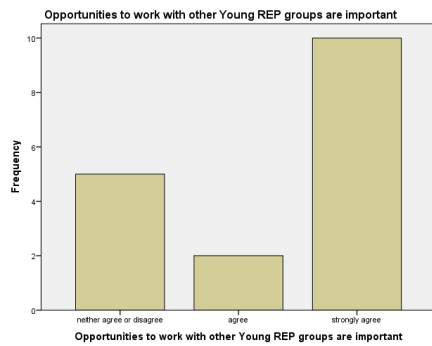
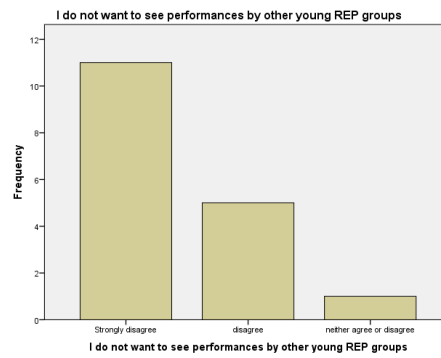
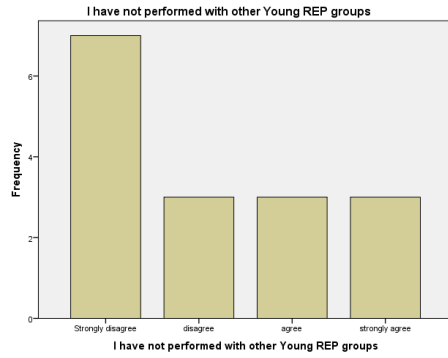


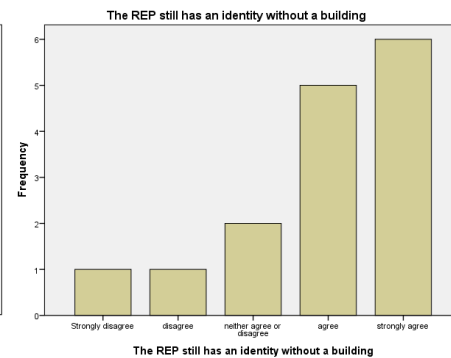
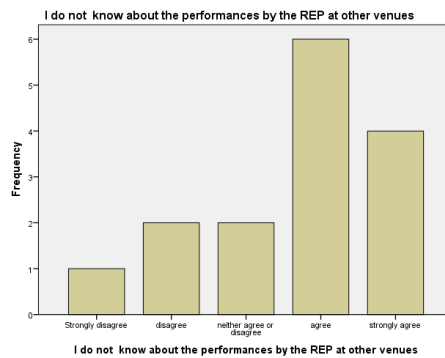
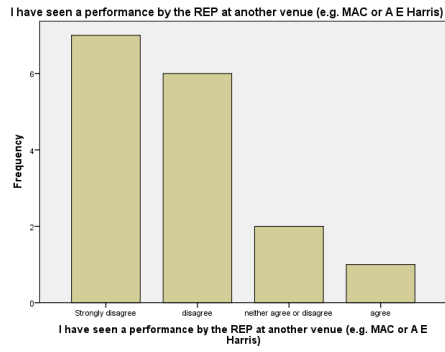
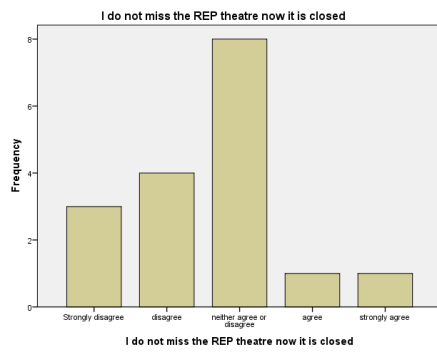
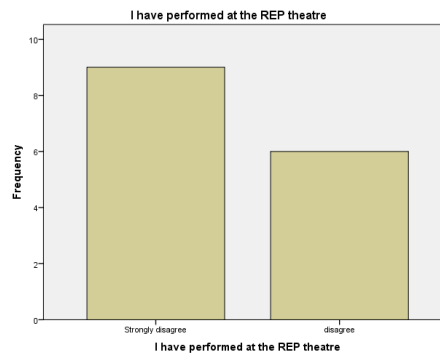
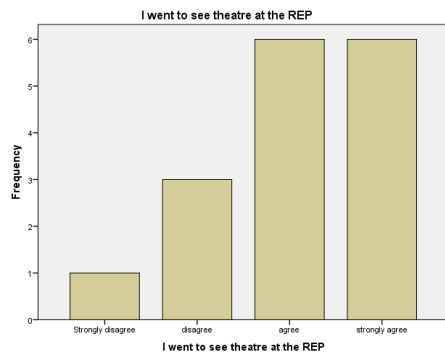
## Appendix 5

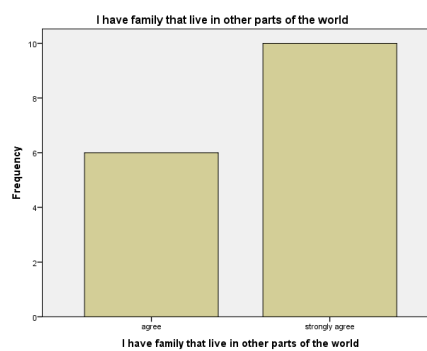
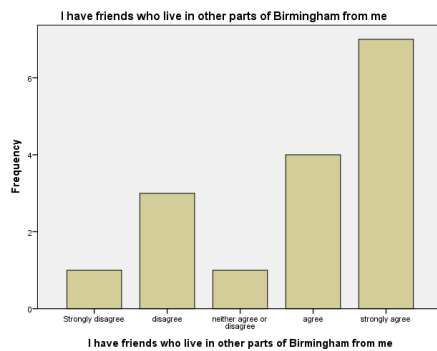
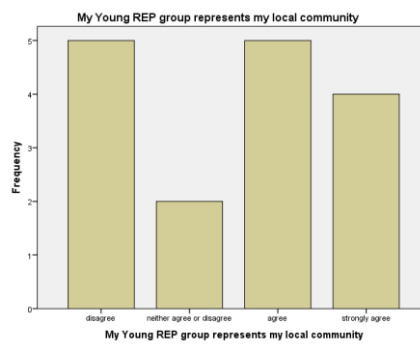
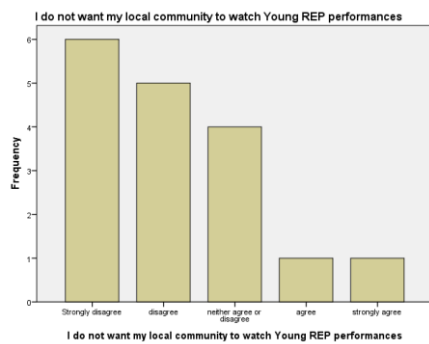
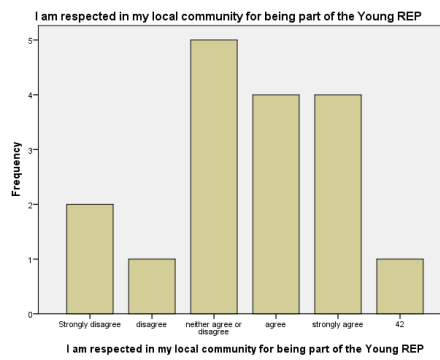
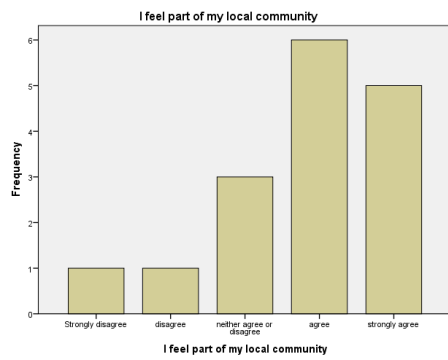
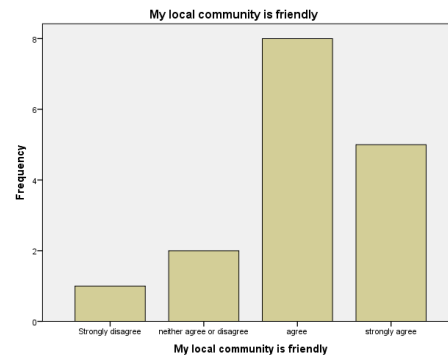
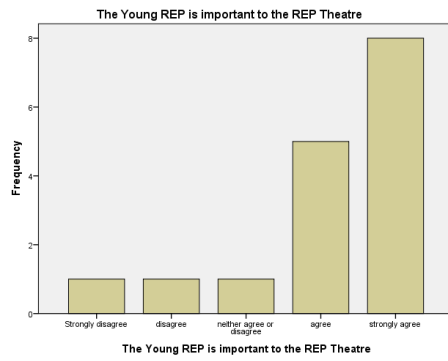
### Example results of Young REP Questionnaire

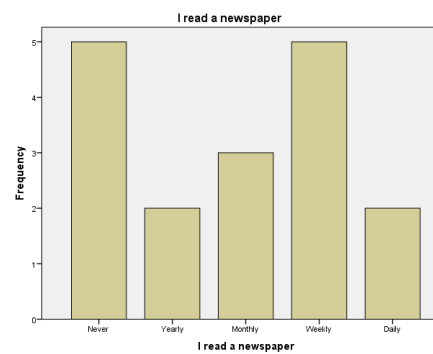
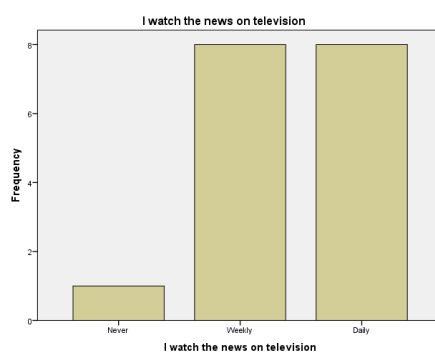
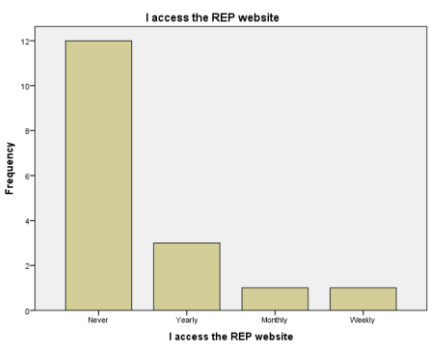
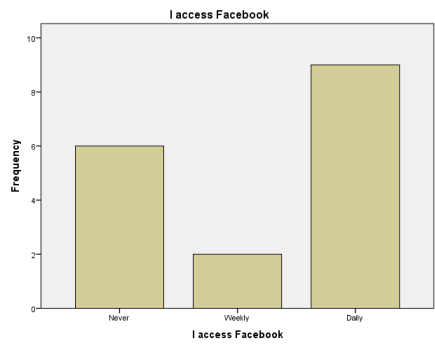
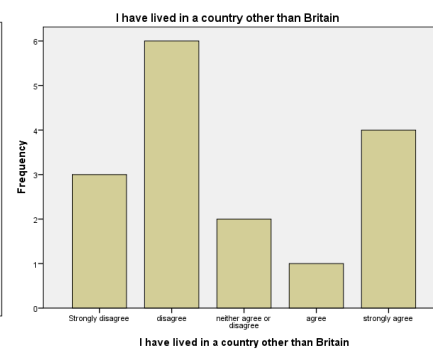
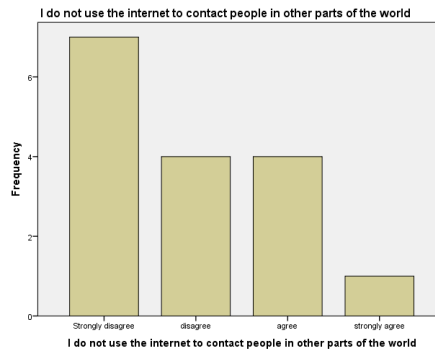
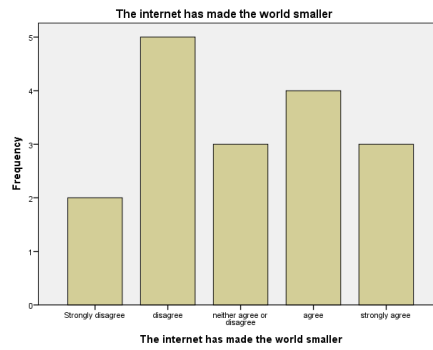
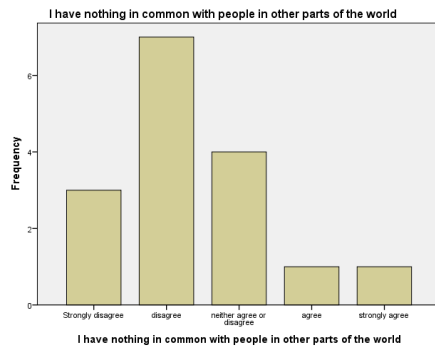
I used SPSS to collate and analyse the results of the questionnaires given to the three case study Young REP groups. Due to the small numbers of participants I did not use percentages or averages. I used the results as another way of gauging the opinions of the group through an additional (anonymous) format, alongside the interviews, drama research workshop and postcards. Below are the results of the *Small Heath Young REP* questionnaire in bar chart form as an example.

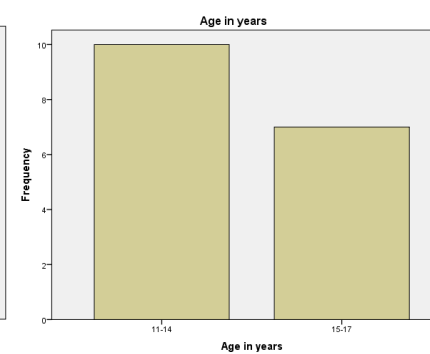
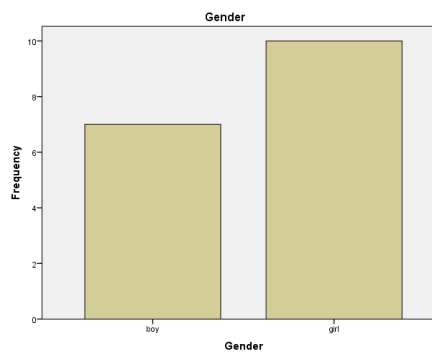
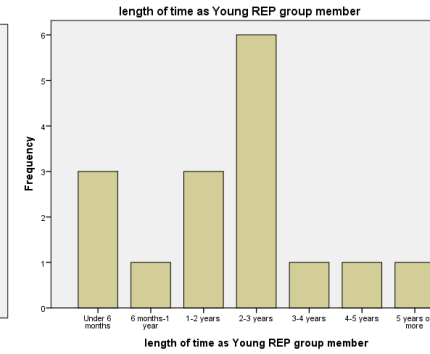
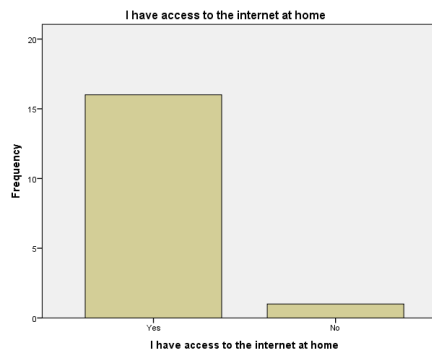
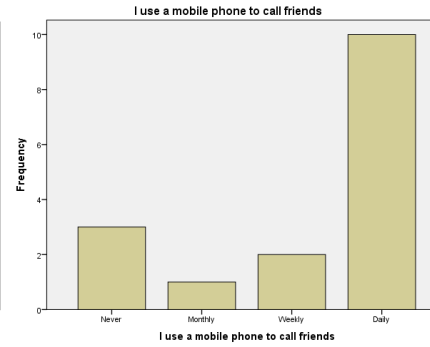
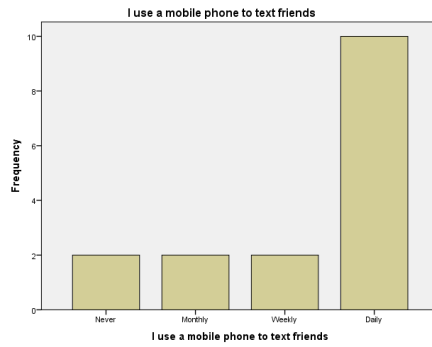
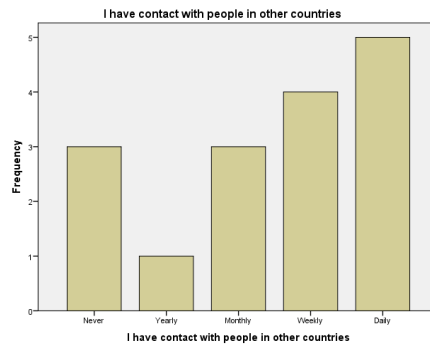
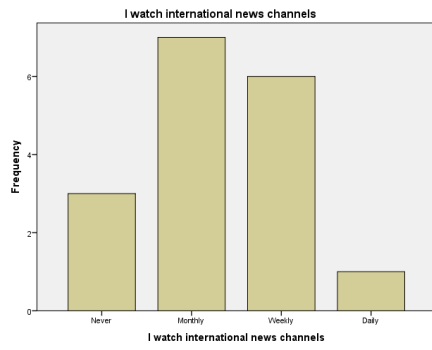


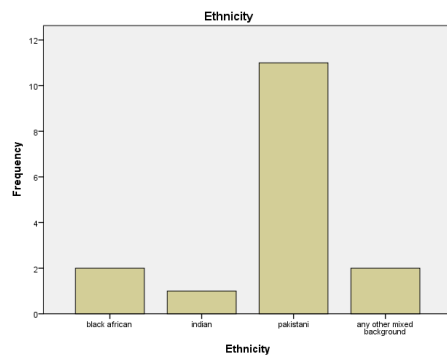












## Appendix 6

When designing the interviews I used a semi-structured interview format. I asked the staff and young people that I interviewed similar questions relating to the themes and research foci. I also asked specific questions relevant to their role or environment. In addition to this, I asked questions which arose during the interview. They are differentiated in the following way:

Underlined are themes (for my reference and not said aloud to interviewees)

***Bold, italic and underlined*** are the semi-structured questions I planned before the interview

Just *italic* are the questions that emerged during the interview

### Example Interview

#### Interview 1 - Questions for Hannah Phillips

Job Title: Director of Young People's Theatre at The Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2011

Location: St George's Court

#### Background

***What is your job title and description?***



*It's interesting I've heard you say before actually and I meant to ask you, that you're referring to it as Young People's Theatre or theatre for young people instead of youth theatre, is that something that you've brought in?*

**How long have you worked for the REP?**

**What attracted you to the post?**

How the REP identifies its relationships to the groups?

**What do you see as the purpose for the REP having youth theatre groups? Or what terminology would you prefer?**

**How do you see your role as situated within L&P?**

*You've started to talk about it already, but **How do you see your role as situated within the whole company?***

**How do you think the theatre as a whole relates to the Young REP?**

How the groups identify their relationship to the REP

**What do you think is the relationship between 14-18 company 2 and the REP?**

**What do you think is the relationship between the other Young REP groups and the REP?**

*comparable to the 14-18 company 2*

How the groups define 'their community'

**If you asked 14-18 Company 2 to say what community they were from what do you think their response would be?**

**In what ways do 14-18 Company 2 represent Birmingham and the region?**

How the groups identify their relationship to the REP Building /How does this function with no building?

**Do you think that different Young REP groups have different relationships to the REP building? If so why?**

**How do you think the relationship of 14-18 Company 2 with the REP will be affected now there is no longer a REP building open?**

**How do you think the relationship of the other Young REP groups with the REP will be affected now there is no longer a REP building open?**

How the groups relate to each other

**How do you think that the different Young REP groups are related to each other?**

Specifically, you've probably covered most of this anyway, but **What is the relationship between 14-18 Company 2 and the other Young REP groups?**

Again, you've touched on this quite a lot already, but just in case there is anything else that you want to say, **Are there any ways that you would like to change the way they relate to each other and if so what?**

Ethical /aesthetic choices for each group and why

**How would you describe the type of work that you facilitate with 14-18 Company 2?**

**I think you've probably said most about your reasons for the decisions that you make for the content, unless there's anything you want to add.....What are the reasons for the decisions that you make for the content of what you work on?**

Anything you want to add for - **What are the reasons for the decisions that you make for the process in which you work?**

**What are the ethical and aesthetic decision that you 're making and why?**

How does the REP represent/serve its community through Young REP?

**How well do you think the REP engages with the community of Birmingham?** I use the word community knowing that the word has all sorts of different ideas.....

Again, we've begun to think about this but **How well do you think the Young REP represents Birmingham?**

**Are there any ways that you think the REP could engage more with its community?**

I think you've already answered this unless you want to add anything?

**What are the challenges with engaging the diverse communities of Birmingham?**

We have started to talk about this

**Are there any communities that you feel are harder to engage with than others and if so why?**

I think we've covered this really, maybe not...In terms of Young REP... **What strategies do you have for engaging diverse communities?** In Young REP

Slightly crash question to ask, but I have to ask it, funding wise, do you have funding in place to do things like double the number of groups etc.?

That's everything from me unless you have a burning desire to say anything else.

## Appendix 7

In collaboration with the youth theatre directors, I designed and ran drama research workshops to explore the relationship that the Young REP participants had with the theatre, their Young REP group and local community. The workshops for the three groups were very similar; however, *14-18 Company 2's* workshops were half an hour longer, and so some additional activities were run including making a representation of The REP as a creature.

### Drama Research Workshop

1 ½ to 2 hours-

#### Warm Ups

##### Anyone Who

(movement and concentration)

##### Diddle-dee-dee

(vocal and focus)

##### I am the Eiffel Tower

Participants asked to step in to embellish the picture with 'I am...' until all are in the picture

#### Relationship to the theatre building

##### I am the Birmingham Repertory Theatre

A chair is placed in the centre of the room to represent the theatre, participants asked to step in to embellish the picture with statement 'I am...' until all are in the picture. Example 'I am an usher'

##### Locations

The photographs taken at The REP by some group members are laid out on the floor around the room.

They are asked to walk around the room as the music plays, when the music stops go to the nearest photo, minimum of 2 and maximum of 5. Then make a still image of the photograph whilst facilitator counts to 10. Repeat three times.

This time they are asked to choose the photograph they most relate to and stand next to it. In these groups they have longer to create the image as a still picture and give it a substance and an emotion. Show and discuss.

##### Selection

In four groups the photos are shared out. They are asked to choose one picture as most important and reject the others and come up with reasons why.

### Sculptures

They are now asked to sculpt one person to represent the chosen picture and give them an emotion and substance. They also need to develop a movement and a sentence to say/do when tapped on the shoulder. Share with the group as one image that can become animated when tapped on the shoulder by the facilitator

### Missing Element

In same groups asked to consider what is missing from the photographs, what is not represented and create 4-5 still images to show it to the rest of the group

### Line of continuum

Participants given two statements at opposing ends of room and asked to stand on the imaginary line of continuum representing how much they agree or disagree with the statements, the nearer they are to the statement the more they agree with it. Facilitators ask a few of them why they are standing where they are

*Theatre only happens in Theatre Buildings v's Theatre can happen anywhere*

*The theatre being closed will be a disaster v's The theatre being closed will be an opportunity*

*The REP is the theatre building v's The REP has a life of its own/its own identity*

### **Relationship to the theatre without a building**

#### I am the Birmingham repertory theatre without a building

This time no chair to represent the theatre as theatre building is closed, participants step in to embellish the picture with statement 'I am...'

## Appendix 8

### My recommendations

Additional ways that The Young REP could be made more aware of the other groups that are based around the city, made to feel part of a larger entity than the group that they attend and attract new members include:

#### Branding

In order to enhance the Young REP identity and sense of community the branding needs to be strengthened, as identified by Hannah Phillips and many of the young people. One opportunity is to offer the young people t-shirts to wear for rehearsals with the Young REP logo on. Most of the young people at the steering group were keen on this idea, and it would also help the school based groups' issue with feeling too school-like in their uniforms. Simply changing t-shirts would be a clear way to denote the change to Young REP from lessons. It would also enhance connections, and a Young REP community outside of groups as Elisa from *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* noted during the steering group, "if people were wearing a Young REP jumper and you saw them walking down the street you would know more people are in the Young REP". On reading these recommendations, Jessica Farmer informed me that they had printed T-Shirts for the young people taking part in the Young REP festival (July 2013) and were having general Young REP t-shirts printed for all members in September 2013.

#### Website

The young people were also keen to have a designated Young REP website which was distinctive from The REP website (but with a link to it). Their access to digital provision varied, but was consistently very high. All of the members of *14-18 Company 2*, 13 out of 14 of *Shenley Young REP Juniors* and 16 out of 17 of *Small Heath Young REP* had access to the internet at home. The REP's Digital Officer noted about the internet: "it's one of those

things that you have to be incredibly careful of because of the digital divide and because there's an economic component, but young people particularly are more likely to engage through social media and through online methods". Rhys McClelland and the Digital Officer had been working together to identify a policy for digital provision for the Young REP; often digital policy and child protection policy were at odds, as one was encouraging a personal and friendly response and the other needs to maintain strict boundaries. There is also the conflict between being open and public when dealing with a young person (rather than private messages) and putting information on line that could be used by predators, such as dates and times a child should be somewhere. However, if appropriate child protection provision were in place, the website could offer both a platform for advertising the Young REP to young people from diverse backgrounds and a place for different groups to interact and be aware of what they were all working on. The images that are chosen to go on the website will also be important, as they should represent the diversity of the Young REP's membership and work to encourage young people to see it as somewhere they would belong.

### **Newsletter**

An alternative or addition to digital provision could be a termly newsletter that was contributed to by members of each group, informing the other groups of what they had done the previous term and upcoming performance dates. Although this would require additional work on behalf of the youth theatre directors, once a template was established young people in the groups could be responsible for providing the content, and the extra work could be minimised.

### **Working together**

Providing the young people with the opportunity to work with other groups would allow them to meet other Young REP members with a creative purpose. This would facilitate a stronger Young REP identity, and allow the young people the opportunity to engage with

young people from a wide range of backgrounds. Jessica Farmer has already established the Young REP festival, but projects could also take the following forms:

***Collaboration***

Holiday projects could offer the chance to bring members of different groups together for one off workshops or week long projects. This would offer the deepest type of interaction, as they would be working together creatively.

***Joint sharing of work***

Joint sharing of work between two groups could be a smaller way of achieving interaction, with less logistical considerations. The Young REP festival utilised double bills to achieve this, but there could also be lower key sharing at BOA or within the satellite schools.

***A distance collaboration***

This could take the form of exchanging ideas, information and creative product over several weeks from their respective rehearsal rooms via the youth theatre directors, and take on a similar form to Noel Greig's *Contacting the World* project (Greig, 2008). They could send each other items such as: postcards about their group, boxes of items that represent them, photographs and videos of their creative process. This could result in a joint sharing of work or a joint workshop.